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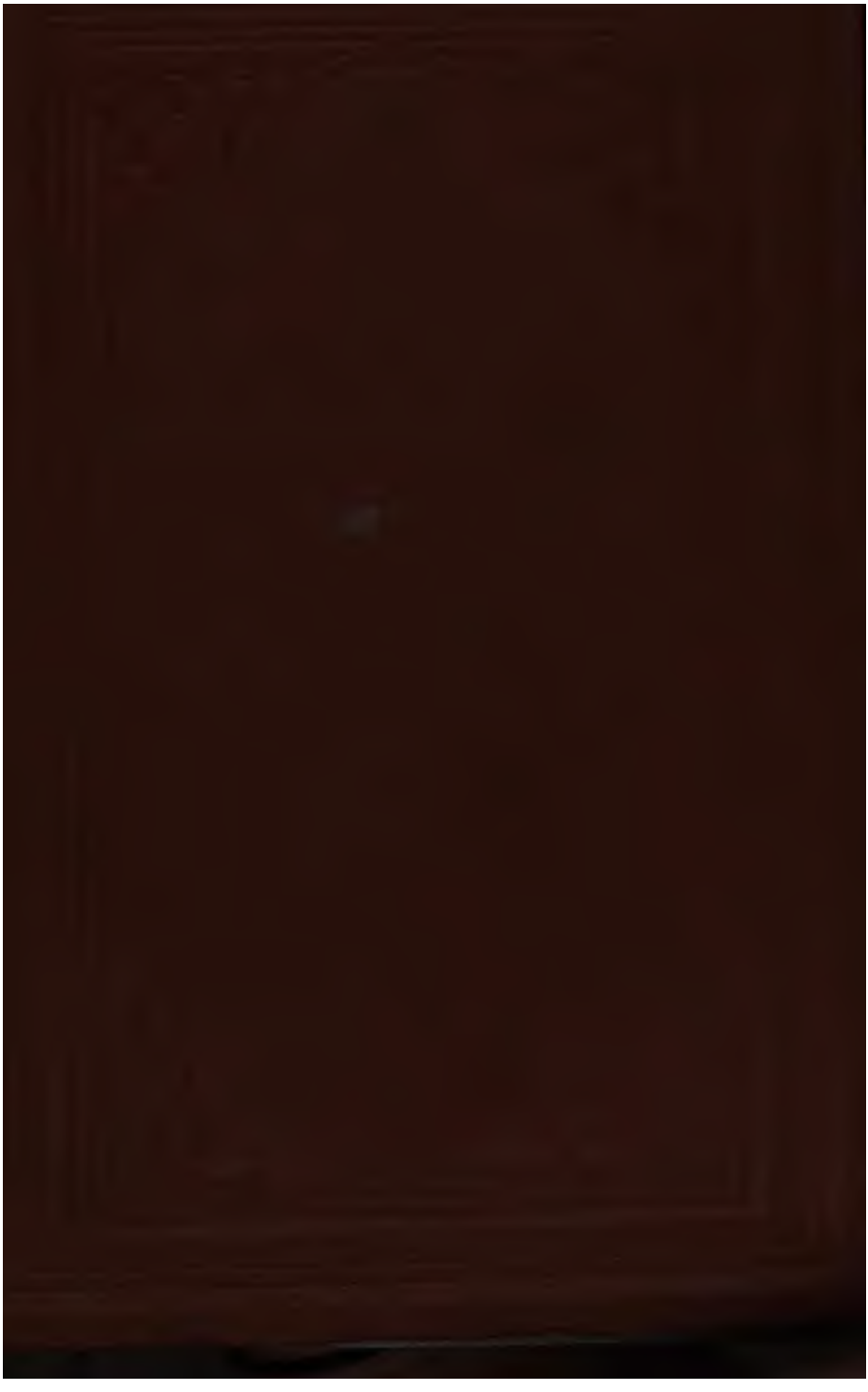

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MISS CAREW.

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BY

AMELIA B. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"BARBARA'S HISTORY,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1865.

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250. a. 277.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

I WAS in love—hopelessly, helplessly, irrationally in love—with Miss Carew.

Hopelessly, of course. How could it be otherwise? I had met her at one or two dinner-parties—I had danced with her at one or two balls—I had bowed to her half a dozen times in the Park. It was the merest acquaintanceship, and nothing more. Had it even been more, what was I, Philip Dundonald, that I should aspire, even in my wildest dreams, to the rich, the beautiful, the brilliant Miss Carew? I might as reasonably have allowed myself to become enamoured of the Venus Milo or the Madonna della Seggiola.

I was only Philip Dundonald, barrister
law ; and I had never held a brief in my l
I was the author of an unsuccessful book–
a transpontine drama, the parentage of wh
I was ashamed to acknowledge—and of a ch
of leaders, light articles, and sensation stori
mere bubbles carried down upon the ev
flowing current of some half-dozen daily a
weekly publications. I was as poor as
meo's apothecary. Miss Carew was a gr
heiress. My life was spent in the solution
that curious philosophical experiment by wh
brains are transmuted into bread. For M
Carew the world was a huge cake, out
which she picked only the plums. I ren
a dingy first-floor overlooking a dusty lit
organ-haunted square in the heart of that
known region lying between Pentonville a
the British Museum. Miss Carew owned
house in Saville Row, an abbey in Yorkshi
and a villa near Florence. In short, I w
as far removed from the sphere in which s

lived and had her being, as if I had been an inhabitant of Uranus.

Nevertheless, I loved her. I loved her from the first moment I beheld her; and that was at an evening-party in Mayfair, at precisely twenty-four minutes past ten o'clock on Thursday evening, the twenty-fourth of December, eighteen hundred and sixty-two. I repaired to the party in full possession of all my faculties. I left it a hopeless lunatic, and went to bed that night in my boots.

Thenceforth the universe for me contained only Miss Carew. I dreamt of her; raved of her; wrote sonnets to her; plunged wildly into evening parties, in the hope of meeting her; wore gloves two sizes too small for my hands, and boots that I blush to look back upon; and bored my best friend, Bob Conyers, to such an inhuman degree, that he fled me at the end of three weeks, and finished the winter in Florence.

Nor was this all. I hired a high-stepping

horse, and distinguished myself in the Park on Sundays. I accepted the theatrical business of the *Pimlico Patriot*, on the bare chance of sometimes seeing my divinity in the stalls; and, having committed every other absurdity of which youth is capable, I crowned the whole by collecting my miscellaneous stories into three showy volumes, and publishing them anonymously, with the following enigmatical dedication:

"*To Miss* * * * * *

"MADAM,

If I dared, I would lay these volumes at your feet, and entreat your gracious permission to ennoble them with your name; but, wanting the courage to address you, I venture only to do with them what I have already done with my heart, myself, and the few talents heaven has bestowed on me—dedicate them to you in silent homage, and suffer them to float down the stream of

time as safely, or perilously, as chance may ordain.

"I am, Madam,

"Your most devoted servant,

"____ ____."

But they were not destined to float down the Stream of Time under any circumstances. They went to the bottom like lead, and were no more seen.

The tales themselves were slight enough, and light enough, to have drifted through the libraries as safely as other straws; and perhaps would have done so, if I had not sent them into the world with a declaration on the title-page. But the reviewers pounced upon my luckless dedication, and made such savage fun of me that the public laughed and passed on—and all because I could not help adoring Miss Carew.

I do not think I was much affected by this ill-fortune. My joys and sorrows were all

"lodged beyond the reach of fate," in Cloud-land, at that time; but I sent a copy of the work (gorgeously bound in white morocco, and addressed in a feigned hand) to Miss Carew, and derived an idiotic satisfaction from the thought that she had perhaps read my stories, and even wondered, not unkindly, who the unknown author might be.

I look back upon the whole of that season as through a mist. I am dimly conscious that I ought not to have been at large. I remember days when I was preposterously happy, and days when I was preposterously miserable. I am haunted by the humiliating recollection of how my landlady surprised me in tears one morning over a dish of devilled kidneys. The kidneys that winter were always blacked, and my boots never. An unlimited duty was levied on my wine and tea; and the cat, with a perverted appetite to which the evidence of Natural History offers no parallel, stole several bundles of my

best cigars. Mrs. Mozley knew my secret. I have not the slightest doubt that she read me as easily as she read my newspapers, my letters, and the rest of my private papers. I was in an abject state, and she treated me as she pleased. What were boots, or kidneys, or choice Havannahs, to a soul given over to the contemplation of Miss Carew?

Thus the winter wore by, and the spring; and the trees in the little square that had looked so green for about a fortnight, were brown and dusty with the summer drought. And still I did penance in the park, and immolated myself at the theatres, and was rewarded at long intervals by a distant bow or a polite smile from Miss Carew. If I caught but a passing glimpse of her once in each long week, I was consoled. If I met her at an evening party—if I danced in the same quadrille with her—I was happy for a month. Once—only once—I was so blest as to hand her down to supper; and went

home, like Paul Flemming, with a halo round my head.

Suddenly, in the middle of June, when the season was at its height, and the weather at its brightest, the sun went out in the heavens, and London became a howling wilderness.

The *Court Journal* announced the departure of Miss Carew for her seat in Yorkshire.

I sent in my resignation to the editor of the *Pimlico Patriot* by the next post, and gave myself up to despair. I told myself that I had done with life. I shaved no more. I wore slippers, scorned cravats, and grew reckless about my hands. I was a misanthrope—a recluse—a hater of my species. I became the terror of all the little boys about the square; and I derived a gloomy satisfaction from the perusal of "Taylor on Poisons."

This crisis had lasted about a week, when Sir Geoffrey Buchanan called upon me.

Sir Geoffrey Buchanan is one of the best men that breathe the good north country air; hearty, joyous, hospitable, boisterous, good-humoured, good-looking, weighs fifteen stone, and stands six feet three without his shoes. He is about forty-five years of age, and owns large estates in Durham and Northumberland. About eight years ago he married a pretty, penniless French governess, who makes him perfectly happy. His ruling hobby is mechanics. With a keen taste for field sports—with a kennel full of hounds, a stable full of hunters, and one of the most perfect yachts that ever flitted over the face of the waters—Geoffrey Buchanan's first and foremost delight is in his workshop. The inventor is born, not made; and Geoffrey is a born inventor. He is gifted with that inconvenient ingenuity that is perpetually on the alert to improve everything. His house is a museum of experimental mechanics; but his inventions, I am bound to confess, seldom

answer the precise purpose for which they are intended. Too frequently, indeed, they do something that nobody expects from them, and which is highly disagreeable when done. He invented a warming apparatus, for instance, that blew up four of his green-houses; a mowing machine that nearly cut his own legs off; and a baby-jumper that all but strangled his eldest-born at the tender age of eleven months. He says of himself that he has achieved more splendid failures than any man of science upon record; but then no amount of failure discourages him. No sooner has one invention turned out badly, than he begins another, still more complicated, still more impracticable, and based, of course, like the last, on the soundest principles. Dear old Geoffrey Buchanan! Everyone laughed at him, and everyone loved him; and I believe I did less of the first, and more of the last, than most people. Yet I cannot say that I was in the least delighted to hear his hearty

voice at my door that dusty, sunny, dismal morning in June, as I sat, obstinately melancholy, in my little first-floor lodging, bewailing my blighted hopes, and Miss Carew.

I had instructed Mrs. Mozley to deny me to all comers; but Sir Geoffrey Buchanan insisted on being admitted.

"Engaged?" I heard him say. "What do you mean by engaged, ma'am? Is he at home, and alone?"

"Mr. Dundonald is at home, sir, and alone, sir," replied my landlady, apologetically; "but it's his particular orders . . ."

"Particular fiddlesticks!" interrupted Buchanan. "I've had trouble enough to find this confounded house, and I'm not going away now without seeing him. There—you needn't announce me, ma'am. I'll make it all right, and take the blame myself. First floor, did you say? Thank you."

And then came his heavy step on the stairs, his jovial face at the door, and a

mighty, outstretched hand that gripped mine till it ached again.

"Here's a pretty fellow!" exclaimed he. "Here's a fellow that refuses to see his friends, and keeps a female griffin to tell them he's engaged. Engaged indeed! If you were not only engaged, but married, Phil Dundonald—married six times over, like Bluebeard—I'd see you, by Jove!"

"Confound it, Buchanan," I said peevishly, "you needn't crush one's hand to a jelly! Your grasp is like a vice."

"Like a vice, my dear fellow? Not a bit of it. Like a virtue—like all the virtues, Christian and Pagan! And now tell me why you shut yourself up in this way. Are you working too hard at this deuced book-making trade?—eh? Spinning stories of love and madness? Dealing out battle, murder, and sudden death at so much per column? It won't do, you know. It won't pay. The machinery of the brain is of a mighty cun-

ning and delicate adjustment, young man, and not easily repaired when out of order."

"I'm not working particularly hard just now," I replied.

"You're not ill, boy?"

"Oh, no—only a little fagged. One gets fagged towards the close of the season."

"Not ill, and not hard at work," said Sir Geoffrey, doubtfully. "Then, to return to my original question—Why do you shut yourself up?"

"Because I'm unsociable."

"And why are you unsociable, Phil?"

"Why do you cross-examine me, as if I were in a witness-box?" I exclaimed, impatiently. "How can I tell why I am unsociable, unless it is because I am sulky—disagreeable—out of sorts—and fit company for no one but myself?"

Buchanan went over to the windows, drew up both the blinds to the very top, and

then, taking me by the shoulders as if I were a child, turned my face to the light and stared at me deliberately.

"You are not well," said he. "You are pale, nervous, irritable—you must let me prescribe for you."

"Nonsense, Buchanan. I am all right."

"On the contrary, you are all wrong. Now look here, my fine fellow—here's a little prescription that I always carry about with me; and as you know the particulars of your own complaint better than I do, all you have to do is just to fill in the figures, and get the physic made up as soon as possible."

Saying which, he took a blank cheque from his pocket-book, and laid it before me on the table.

I put the paper back into his hand.

"Upon my life, Buchanan," I said, hurriedly, "you are altogether mistaken. I feel your kindness as much as if I accepted it; but I am as free from difficulty as yourself.

I have more than I need; and I owe no man a farthing."

With a troubled look upon his honest face, he replaced the cheque in his pocket-book.

"Well," he said, "if you won't speak, I can't make you; but I'm confident there's something wrong—and I know I could do something to put matters straight, if you'd only give me the chance. However, that's not what I came here to say. I've only been in London two days, and I go home to-night; but I was determined not to leave the place without seeing you. I want you to come down to Seaborough Court the week after next."

"Thank you," I replied; "but . . . ."

"It will do you all the good in the world, man—let a little fresh air in upon your imagination, and clean the windows in your brain."

"But I cannot spare the time at present," I replied.

"You said just now you were not particularly busy!"

"If I am not, I ought to be. My publisher is really urgent, just now, about a little book that ought to be in the press, and . . ."

"Fiddlesticks! We'll give you a den to scribble in, if scribble you must."

"Upon my word, Buchanan . . . ."

"Upon my last will and testament, Dundonald, I daren't go home without your promise. My wife told me to take no refusal, and, by Jove, sir, you must and shall come."

"Lady Buchanan is a great deal too kind," I said; "but it will be far pleasanter and more convenient to me to run down to Durham later in the year."

"It won't be half so pleasant," persisted my friend. "Later in the year we shall perhaps be alone; and you know, my dear boy, we're not amusing people ourselves. We're well enough in our way; but it's a common-place, humdrum way. If you come now, you'll

meet a nice little party. There'll be our lively neighbour, the Honourable Mrs. Macpherson . . ."

"A detestable woman—like a comb, all back and teeth."

"And Brewer—you remember Brewer of the 18th Light Dragoons?"

"There are few people whom I would forget with greater pleasure. Captain Brewer unites the profligacy of Whitehall to the dulness of Buckingham Palace; and I hate anachronisms."

"Well, then, there's Lord Sherbrooke—you won't deny that he's worth meeting; or that he's a thoroughly sensible, well-informed, cultivated man?"

"Lord Sherbrooke is the greatest bore I know. He is not a man at all—he is simply a work of compilation. His mind is as ill-dressed as his body, and his opinions, like his clothes, have something incongruous about them, as if they belonged to somebody else.

And so they do. He hasn't a thought that is not second-hand; and he steals from the dead as shamelessly as he steals from the living. Talk to him about art, and he spouts Ruskin —about theology, and he gives you a dilution of Colenso—about politics, and he garbles last night's debate. If he ventures on a witticism, it is Sydney Smith's; and when he grows sentimental over the third bottle of port, he drenches you with Moore and Byron. No, my dear fellow, you cannot tempt me with Lord Sherbrooke."

"So it seems," said Geoffrey, half-laughing, half-vexed. "What a bitter temper you're in, man! What's the matter with you?"

"The deuce knows," I replied, fretfully. "I told you I was fit company for no one but myself; and you see I was right."

"I see that you are bent on making the worst of yourself, and staying at home," said Buchanan, taking up his gloves, and preparing to be gone. "I'm heartily sorry for it."

"And I am sorry to say 'No' so often—I am, indeed. But I shall enjoy Seaborough Court twice as much when you are alone."

"By-the-by, I didn't tell you all the names, either. Clement Stone is coming."

"The Rector of Broadmere? I remember him. A very pleasant, gentlemanly fellow."

"That he is, Phil—a capital fellow! And Miss Carew."

I could not believe my ears.

"*And who?*" I asked, faintly.

"Miss Carew—Miss Carew of Wandesborough Abbey. I'm surprised, Phil, that you don't know Miss Carew."

The sun was shining in the heavens again; the howling wilderness had burst into blossom; the world was a garden of Eden; and I had not done with life, after all!

"I—I believe I have met Miss—the lady you mention," I said, indifferently—"in society."

"No doubt—no doubt. She goes everywhere. Any message for Clement Stone?"

He asked me if I had any message for Clement Stone! He had taken me at my word, and he was actually going! In another minute it would be too late. I became desperate.

"My regards, of course," I replied. "My very cordial regards. He is a man whom I like immensely—a man whose religion is of the right, sunny, genial sort; and who, because he is wise, does not disdain to be witty. I am very sorry not to meet him."

"He will be very sorry too," said that obtuse Geoffrey. "He took to you amazingly; and he often speaks of you. Bless my heart! two o'clock already, and I have an appointment in the City at three. Good-bye, my dear fellow—God bless you!"

"I tell you what it is, Buchanan—if you had mentioned Stone's name from the first, I'm not sure that I should have been so obsti-

nate in my refusal," said I, in a burst of candour.

It was a consummate piece of hypocrisy, and I cannot remember it to this day without a blush; but it was my last, and only sure card—and I played it.

Sir Geoffrey Buchanan opened his blue eyes, and lifted up his great voice in a joyous laugh that might have been heard across the square.

"In the name of all the Gods, then," said he, "why don't you change your mind?"

"Because—because you'll think me such a fool if I do."

"Then upon my life, Phil, I shall think it the only redeeming piece of sense that you've perpetrated to-day. Come, is it settled, and may we expect you next Monday week?"

"Well—I think you may; wind and weather permitting."

"Listen to him! What have you, a landsman, to do with wind and weather, I should like to know? By-the-by, I've made a most

remarkable improvement in my yacht—really an extraordinary improvement, Phil."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"An arrangement of wheels and pulleys by which all the ropes can be worked by one man—that man sitting quietly at his work in a little deck-cabin built up amidships for the purpose. I can't explain it to you without the diagrams: but I assure you it's the most remarkable improvement of the age."

"You're as bad, Buchanan," said I, laughingly, "as Monsieur Auguste Comte, who thinks he could improve the solar system. What will you attempt to improve next?"

"Your manners, Phil!" he replied, with another great laugh. "Your manners. But I mean to patent my invention, sir—ay, and to bring it before the Board of Admiralty, too. But there, it's of no use to talk to an incredulous youngster like you. Good-bye, till Monday week; and beware of that female griffin down-stairs. She's a terrific phenome-

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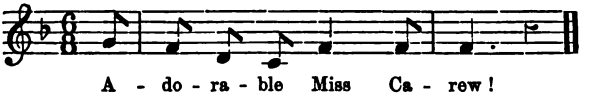
non, by Jove!—a cross between Medusa and the Sphinx."

Saying which, he again nearly wrenched my hand off, and went down the stairs, laughing like a Titan.

He had found me in the lowest circle of the *Inferno;* he left me in the *Paradiso.* I was in a blissful dream. I walked upon air; I breathed sunshine; I was pervaded by a sentiment of universal benevolence. I felt that I could have taken Mrs. Mozley in my arms, and invoked benisons upon her; but I abstained from that act of devotion, and presented her, instead, with a bottle of my best brandy. The chop that I ate that day for my dinner was cut from an Arcadian sheep, and had the flavour of the golden age. My apple-dumpling was made from the golden fruit of the Hesperides. My modest pint of ordinary claret tasted like that "mighty wine" given to Ulysses by Maron the priest of Phœbus. The very organ that droned "the

Low-backed Car" under my window, while I discussed my humble banquet, seemed, to my infatuated ear, to repeat a perpetual refrain of



CHAPTER II.

SEABOROUGH COURT stands high, and faces the sea. The waves that roll in so heavily upon the beach with the flow of the tide, ebb back, unbroken by even a rock, to the coast of Denmark. A low chain of hills protects the house towards the north, so that it occupies a kind of natural terrace between the higher ground and the level of the sea. There are but few trees, and the general aspect of the place, facing as it does to the north-east, is somewhat bleak and barren; but the pasture lands beyond the hills are rich and abundant, and the air in summer is

delicious. The house itself is an incongruous pile, the oldest portion of which dates back to the Wars of the Roses; but which has been, in the course of centuries, so frequently altered, enlarged, and modernized, that scarcely any of its historical features remain. It is not in the least like those antique mansions that novelists delight to describe. It is not "a dear old place," with ivied turrets, lilied moats, and pannelled drawing-rooms looking out upon ancestral oaks. In it are no dusky corridors, nor tapestried chambers, nor cloistered courtyards. No half-deserted chapel, peopled with the crumbling effigies of bygone knights and dames, nestles in the shadow of its walls. On the contrary, it presents at first sight a thoroughly substantial, comfortable aspect; is in excellent repair; not in the least picturesque; and, on the side of the principal entrance, bears a strong general resemblance to the College of Surgeons. It is only when one has been

round to the back, and grown learned in the ins and outs of Seaborough Court, that its antiquity becomes apparent. An unfamiliar guest might dwell there for weeks without discovering that it was anything but a good modern house; and yet it contains a wing of the time of William and Mary, a magnificent Elizabethan kitchen and buttery, and cellars of massy vaulted stone as old as the battle of Hexham. But my friend Geoffrey is no archæologist, and troubles himself very little about the past glories of his family, his residence, or anything that is his. He is prouder of his old port than of his pedigree; and prouder, perhaps, of a corkscrew of his own invention than of either. As for his kitchen and cellarage, they are both famous; but their fame is founded on the good things that come out of them, and not upon their mediæval merits—and that is precisely the sort of renown that their owner appreciates.

I went down to Durham on the Monday

week, as proposed—that memorable Monday of that memorable first week in July—taking with me dress-gloves enough for Briareus, and dress-boots enough for a centipede. As for perfumery and pomade, I could have oiled and scented a volunteer corps without being perceptibly the poorer. I do not think, by the way, that psychological inquirers have directed such attention as the question deserves, to that subtle link which connects pomade with the tender passion. It is in the mysterious nature of things that Cupid and Briedenbach should play into one another's hands. A man in love gravitates by an inevitable law towards bear's grease, and takes a morbid interest in his hair. I remember that I derived inexpressible consolation at this time from the purchase of Patent Moelline, Glycerine Oil, Crystalline Cream, Nutritive Pomade, and the like emollient substances. Above all, that I found a soothing influence, such as "divine philosophy" never shed upon the troubled

soul of man, in Rowland's Balm of Columbia.

It is not in my power to give any coherent account of the first two or three days at Seaborough Court. They went by, as it were, in an elemental dream of love and jealousy, bliss and despair. I was jealous of Captain Brewer, of Lord Sherbrooke, of the Reverend Clement Stone (who had a wife and seven children in Berkshire), and of even dear, good, hospitable Geoffrey Buchanan himself. I could neither sleep, nor eat, nor talk as in the days when my heart was free of Miss Carew. I had been used to make some little success in society once upon a time; but now I could not have said a brilliant thing to save my life. I was painfully conscious of my own shy stupidity. I knew that I was duller than Brewer, and that even Lord Sherbrooke's plagiarisms left me in the shade. I burned to distinguish myself. I wished that there might be a great storm, and a vessel wrecked in sight of the house; and pictured to myself how I

alone, of any man upon that coast, would go out with a rope about my waist, and save the fainting sufferers one by one. I wished that Seaborough Court might take fire in the night, and thought how glorious it would be, when the conflagration was at its highest, and the dastard crowd stood aloof, to rush forward through the smoke and flames, and battle my way up the burning staircase, till I found the chamber where Miss Carew stood at the window, appealing in vain for help from those below. Then I would take her in my arms; wrap a blanket round her beloved form, to protect her drapery from the flames; and bear her, staggering, breathless, but undaunted, to a place of safety, where, falling at her feet, all blackened and ghastly, I would say, "I love you, Helen Carew! I never dared to tell you till now,"—*and so die.*

But these were wild dreams. The weather was glorious; the sea like a mirror of blue steel; and as for fire, there seemed no more

chance of it than if Seaborough Court had been built, like the palace of the O'Donaghue, at the bottom of the Lake of Killarney.

At length there came a morning—I think it was the fourth or fifth after my arrival—when we went out for a long day on the water in Sir Geoffrey's yacht. The party consisted of Mrs. Macpherson, the Reverend Clement Stone, Captain Brewer, Miss Carew, and myself. Buchanan, as captain of his own "tub," took the lead. Lord Sherbrooke, with whom the sea disagreed, remained behind; and Lady Buchanan preferred to stay at home with her children.

I think I never saw so splendid a morning. We had weighed anchor by eight, and breakfasted on board. Everyone was in the highest spirits. The sea was inconceivably blue, and melted into a golden haze on the horizon. A delicious air breathed from the south, and dimpled the waters now and then, as with a smile. The shore receded by imperceptible

[illegible] the [illegible] at intervals between us and the sky: and the yacht glided on with [illegible] like a toy ship upon a vast [illegible] water. We were bound to a [illegible] near shore of the coast of Northumberland, nine [illegible] miles to the north of Scarborough Court, where we were to [illegible] a week or [illegible] in an island, said [illegible], known as a mile and a half in circumference, containing three or four fishermen's cottages, where a dozen inhabitants, one [illegible] or two, a handful of herbage, and a few sheep, [illegible] ever went there. It was [illegible] on no map. It had not even a name. [illegible] it were [illegible].

[illegible] we were, then, laughing, talking, [illegible] on the sea and the sunshine, and [illegible] almost by Sir Geoffrey's ingenious [illegible] in the management of his yacht. He [illegible] to show it, and explain it, and [illegible] it over and over again. He [illegible] that it was the most useful, the

most surprising, the most important improvement that the world had seen for the last quarter of a century. It really did seem very ingenious. I have not now the slightest conception of what the mechanism was; but I understood it well enough, or fancied I understood it, at the time. All that I remember of it is a kind of framework fixed about half-way down the mainmast, serving, I think, to collect a large number of ropes into a nucleus, whence they were drawn still lower through the roof of an absurd-looking little sentry-box, in the middle of the deck. Inside this sentry-box was a bewildering maze of pulleys, nooses, and knotted rope's ends; and it looked more like a very small and overcrowded belfry than anything else that I could think of.

Thus the first hour or two went by, somewhat lazily on the part of the yacht, but very pleasantly. About half-past ten, the breeze freshened a little, and some three or

four tiny clouds, white and fleecy, like a flight of swans, rose out from the golden haze, and drifted across the sky. Then the sails swelled; a joyous ripple sprang up under our bows; and our progress became perceptibly quickened. By eleven, we were cutting through the water at a brilliant rate, scattering a shower of diamonds at every dip of our prow, and leaving a creamy trail in our wake, that widened and vanished as we left it behind. Every little wave by this time had its crest; and the sky was traversed by a long procession of majestic, opalescent clouds, which became every moment statelier and more numerous. Then the wind shifted a point or two, and the yacht began to pitch rather more than was strictly agreeable.

I went up to Geoffrey in the sentry-box, and found him looking very red and warm, and ringing, as it seemed to me, a frantic peal upon all the imaginary bells at once.

"The yacht pitches confoundedly, my dear

fellow," I said. "She doesn't seem so steady on her legs as last year. What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing," replied my friend, clutching desperately at two or three different nooses in succession, as if he wanted to hang himself, and was feeling for the stoutest rope. "Nothing ails the yacht—it's only these pulleys that don't work as they ought. I'm trying to bring her head round a bit, and . . . ."

A tremendous lurch, followed by a little scream from Mrs. Macpherson, interrupted his explanation.

"And in the meanwhile, I presume, we all run a fair chance of going to the bottom?"

"It's the first time I've ever known the system work badly," groaned poor Buchanan.

"System, indeed!" I exclaimed, angrily. "What business have you to endanger your friends' lives with any system under the sun? Confound your system!"

At this moment the entanglement, what-

ever it might be, yielded to his efforts—the mainsail swung to its proper bearings, and the little vessel, now once more before the wind, sped on as before.

"Buchanan drew a deep breath, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Don't say anything about this to the others, Phil," he said, hurriedly. "I'm very sorry—more shocked and sorry than I can tell you. The truth is, the thing does not answer as I had hoped—and—and our position just now was—was really, for a moment or two, a position of danger."

I looked at the sky and the sea, and the lovely, laughing face of Miss Carew, as she sat talking on the after-deck; and a sudden pang of apprehension shot through me.

"If I am any judge of weather, Geoffrey Buchanan," I said, "we shall have a gale blowing up before three more hours have gone by."

"I know it," he replied.

"You know it? Good heavens, man! what do you mean by saying you know it? What do you propose to do to ensure the safety of your yacht?"

"Look there," said he, pointing straight ahead. "Do you see the island?"

"I see something—a mere point—a scrap of rock scarcely big enough for a seagull to build on."

He smiled and shook his head.

"Don't be too hard upon me, Phil," said he. "Don't make quite the worst of everything. That's the island, and we are within three miles of it. It isn't quite as big as Australia; but it's big enough to afford you all a pleasant resting-place, while I press the fishermen into my service, and set to work to put the yacht trim and ship-shape again, before we start for home. A couple of hours will do it; and as for all this gear, it shall be pitched overboard as soon as we drop anchor —every thread and pulley of it!"

He sighed as he said this, and glanced up regretfully at his invention. Indignant as I had been a few moments before, I felt sorry for him now.

"No, no," I said, "don't do that—don't throw it overboard. Stow it away in the hold; and perhaps when you have leisure to turn the thing over in your mind, you may hit upon some alteration that will make your system available after all!"

He shook his head again.

"I think not," he replied; "I fear not. Pshaw! 'tis only another illusion gone. I am used to reading the burial service over my dreams."

He spoke with a bitterness foreign to his nature. I saw that he was deeply mortified, and even more disappointed than mortified; so I said a cheering word or two and left him —as I felt sure he would prefer to be left— alone.

The little isle was now growing momen-

tarily more distinct, and every glass was levelled at it. Transparent and purplish at first, it changed from purple to grey, from grey to a greenish brown, and presently showed as an irregular whinstone rock, sloping to the sea on the south-east, and rising to the north in a kind of turfy promontory. As we drew nearer, there became visible a little cluster of white cottages near the water's edge—a boat moored in a tiny creek close by—a clump of gaunt trees on a green rise about the very centre of the islet; and a few sheep dotted over the broken upland. To the left, some six or seven miles distant, lay the undulating coast of Northumberland, and the dim outlines of the hills. Far and wide, in every other direction, north-east, east, and south, stretched the sea. A more utterly barren, unpromising rock, could scarcely be conceived in dull, or stormy weather; but seen thus in the full blaze of a brilliant July sun, with a fresh breeze blow-

privilege, from most of the taxes levied elsewhere. They also added to their scanty gains by the preparation of kelp and the breeding of a few sheep. The children knew of no world beyond that in which they were born; and we found that one of the women had not even been over to the mainland for more than eleven years.

We went into their cottages; one of which served as a little general shop, and supplied the place with groceries, hardware, and haberdashery of the humblest description. The old man made nets, and did a little cobbling and carpentering. In each home we saw a Bible; and in one a hymn-book, and a few Scriptural prints in black frames. One of the women kept a cock and three or four hens; and all the little dwellings were clean and tidy.

Having chatted with the women, patted the children on their flaxen heads, and distributed a few presents among them, we went

up to the plateau where the sheep and the trees were, and prepared our picnic. In a few minutes the cloth was spread, the hampers were unpacked, the corks drawn, and the guests seated.

It was a merry meal, and we were as hungry as befitted people who had spent three or four hours on the sea. We jested, we langhed, we drank healths, we made speeches, we christened the island Juan Fernandez, and poured a libation of champagne upon the scanty turf in consecration of the name. When we had quite done, and were lying listlessly round the remains of our feast, Sir Geoffrey proposed cigars; so we four men strolled away to a point of steep rock at the northward extremity of the island, and left the ladies to amuse themselves till our Havannahs were smoked out. No sooner were we well out of earshot, however, than Buchanan took me by the arm, and, drawing me aside, said in a low, troubled voice,

"I'm at a dead lock, Dundonald. That old man down yonder is of no use, and I have only one sailor and a boy on board. It will be impossible to get the yacht in sailing trim, in time for us to reach Seaborough Court to-night."

I looked at him in blank dismay.

"WHAT?" said I.

"We shall have to stop here," he replied, "till to-morrow."

"Stop here? On this wretched rock—with two ladies. . . . Nonsense, Buchanan, you are joking!"

"I wish to heaven I were," said he, gravely; "but the breeze is freshening every moment, and look at the sky—look at those huge leaden clouds piling up to the windward! I daren't risk it, with the yacht in its present state. There's no help for it."

"But here are four of us. Set us all to work, and let us see what we can do. I'm ready to turn up my sleeves and begin; and

Brewer and Stone, of course, will do the same."

"I have thought of that," replied my friend, "and I spoke about it to my mate just now, as he was bringing up the hampers; but it would be of no use. It's seaman's work; and we want all sorts of things that are not to be had in this place. No—all we can do is, to wait patiently till the two fishermen come back; and then send them over to the nearest coast-town for such tools, and tackling, and help as may be needful."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "we may be kept here, at that rate, for a day or two!"

"I hope not—but I fear we can hardly get off to-morrow."

I sat down on the turf in despair.

"What will Miss Carew do?" I ejaculated.

"What will Mrs. Macpherson do?" added Sir Geoffrey, with a comical shrug. "Miss Carew is a sensible, high-spirited, genial wo-

man, and will treat the whole thing as a rare piece of adventure; but Mrs. Macpherson will be as helpless and miserable as a Frenchman on board a Channel steamer."

"We must break it to them," said I.

"I dare not,'" said he. "Will you?"

"Not for the universe. Ask the parson."

So we called up Mr. Stone and Captain Brewer, and revealed the difficulty we were in. The gallant dragoon scowled, twirled his mustachios, and muttered a few oaths between his teeth; but the rector of Broadmere roared with laughter; protested that a pleasanter calamity could not possibly have befallen us; and went off upon our forlorn hope with all the assurance in life. He was the very man for the purpose—a man with a laughing eye, a persuasive voice, a large good-humoured mouth, a portly presence, and an inexhaustible fund of good humour. Armed with these good gifts, and with absolute confidence in his own eloquence, our ambassador presented

himself before the ladies, and stated our case so successfully that the result surpassed our hopes. They received the dreadful intelligence, not merely with indulgence, but with favour and merriment: and in a few minutes we were all going down to the cottages in a body, to see what arrangements could be made for their accommodation.

The result was that the largest tenement was secured for Miss Carew and Mrs. Macpherson, the inhabitants migrating en masse, and distributing themselves as well as they could among their neighbours: while we men agreed to pass the night on board. In the meanwhile, a signal "cleaning up" and "clearing out" was accomplished in the lower deck. A supply of rugs, mattresses, blankets, wraps, and other comforts was supplied from the yacht: and in the course of an hour or two, by the help of a pretty widespread, a row of cottage-floors, some kitchen-chairs from the cuddy, a state cabin,

and a few such trifles, we had succeeded in turning the single ground-floor room into a very tolerable parlour. In this parlour, later in the day, we took tea; and a very merry tea it was—with Miss Carew at the head of the table. After tea, having no cards, no music, no books, no appliances or means of entertainment whatever, we strolled out again to the higher ground, and watched the sea and the sky. It was a grand sight. The sun had just gone down behind a bank of purple vapour. The waves, now of a dull lead colour, were running high, and beat savagely against the rocks. Troops of wild, rent, ragged clouds fled in tumultuous panic over the face of the heavens; and the moaning of the wind sang a shrill treble to the hoarse bass of the sea. Presently, a tremendous sheet of lightning seemed to rend open the whole broad field of sky, and a mighty peal of thunder shook the very ground beneath our feet. We hastened back to the cottage,

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The result was that the largest tenement was secured for Miss Carew and Mrs. Macpherson, the inhabitants migrating *en masse*, and distributing themselves as well as they could among their neighbours; while we men agreed to pass the night on board. In the meanwhile, a rapid "cleaning up" and "clearing out" was accomplished in the ladies' bower; a supply of rugs, mattresses, blankets, napery, and other comforts was imported from the yacht; and in the course of an hour or two, by the help of a pretty tablecloth, a vase of cottage-flowers, some folding-chairs from Sir Geoffrey's state cabin,

and a few such trifles, we had succeeded in turning the single ground-floor room into a very tolerable parlour. In this parlour, later in the day, we took tea; and a very merry tea it was—with Miss Carew at the head of the table. After tea, having no cards, no music, no books, no appliances or means of entertainment whatever, we strolled out again to the higher ground, and watched the sea and the sky. It was a grand sight. The sun had just gone down behind a bank of purple vapour. The waves, now of a dull lead colour, were running high, and beat savagely against the rocks. Troops of wild, rent, ragged clouds fled in tumultuous panic over the face of the heavens; and the moaning of the wind sang a shrill treble to the hoarse bass of the sea. Presently, a tremendous sheet of lightning seemed to rend open the whole broad field of sky, and a mighty peal of thunder shook the very ground beneath our feet. We hastened back to the cottage,

and had scarcely reached shelter before the storm began in earnest. And a terrible storm it was. It lasted nearly the whole night, and kept us all awake till daybreak. But for the snug little creek in which the yacht had been anchored, heaven only knows what would have become of us. In any less sheltered nook, she must have been torn from her moorings like a mere weed; while we must either have sent her adrift to take her chance with the wind and waves, or have risked almost certain death in the attempt to navigate her.

However, none of these misfortunes happened. The morning came; and with it a sea still rolling, a wind still blowing; but sunshine, safety, and prospects evidently mending.

We assembled at nine for breakfast; all except Sir Geoffrey, who was busy down at the yacht, and somewhat late. Miss Carew presided at the tea-table. It seemed natural to

her to take the lead, and natural to us that she should take it. There was grace in all she did; and her manner of doing it seemed, somehow, to ennoble the commonest action. She could not pour out a cup of tea without appearing to enhance the value of the little courtesy by the way in which she rendered it. I had heard the same thing said of Mrs. Siddons by those who had known her in private; but I never quite believed them till I became acquainted with Miss Carew.

I would not, however, be supposed to compare Miss Carew with Mrs. Siddons in any particular but this; nor even desire to say that in this she did actually resemble her. There was nothing tragic, or majestic, about Miss Carew. Hers was the unconscious dignity of good-breeding; but it was a dignity perfectly compatible with the most airy, brilliant, sportive gaiety that ever bewitched the heart of a man. Her laugh was soft and low, yet musical as a silver *carrillon;* and her eyes

—her large, limpid golden-brown eyes—had that half wild archness and vivacity of expression that has been sometimes indicated by Romney, but has never been rendered in perfection save by the brush of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It was a merry breakfast, and quite a luxurious one, considering our shipwrecked condition. We had tea, toast, eggs, and fish; flowers on the table; and, through the open door, an enchanting glimpse of the sunlit sea. The conversation turned on what we were to do with ourselves all the long day. For the ladies, walking was simply impossible. The heavy rains of the last ten hours had reduced the turfy plateau to a mere bog; and, save the little space of rock and clay on which the cottages stood, the plateau was the island.

"There is not a book to be had in the place," said Miss Carew; "except the Bible."

"Estimable work, no doubt," drawled the dragoon; "but decidedly heavy."

"If we had but a pack of cards, *I* could be content," sighed Mrs. Macpherson.

"Mr. Dundonald, who, I have heard it whispered, is a poet," said Miss Carew, "must be our Feramorz, and invent stories for our entertainment; while Captain Brewer, who so admirably criticises a volume which, I presume, he has never read, can undertake the part of Fadladeen. The character is as if it were made for him."

While I was stammering something about my inability to perform the task assigned to me, Sir Geoffrey suddenly darkened the doorway with his six feet three of solid substance.

"Good morning to you all!" said he, in his vociferous, hearty way. "I come before you, ladies and gentlemen, as a public benefactor. Prepare an oration for me. Wreathe the flow-

"A shilling's worth of Waste Paper!" we repeated with the unanimity of an Exeter Hall chorus.

He burst into a joyous laugh.

"I thought that would astonish you," he said. "Now listen, and I will tell you all about it. I have just been into the shop—you know the general shop in the next cottage—to buy a supply of tea, sugar, tobacco, and so forth, for my two poor fellows down at the yacht. There was a pile of waste paper on the counter, and from this pile of waste paper the good woman who served me took a sheet, or a half-sheet, to wrap up each packet of groceries as she weighed it out. I saw that it was printed matter, and that it looked like good type and good paper. I took up a piece. It was evidently part of a tale, and looked amusing. I turned over a few more leaves, and found that the lot consisted of a collection of stories, ready folded as if for binding. The title-pages and beginning were

wanting; but what there was appeared to be consecutive. I thought at once of the destitution of my friends, and bought up the whole stock on the spot. Now for your vote of thanks!"

"You must wait for that, my dear fellow, till we have seen whether your purchase is readable," said Mr. Stone. "Waste paper at twopence the pound is rather unpromising stuff."

"Horrid trash, no doubt," observed Captain Brewer.

"Trash is better than nothing," said Miss Carew, kindly; "if it only gives us something to laugh at. May I look at your treasure, Sir Geoffrey? I have no doubt we shall quarry a great deal of amusement out of it, somehow. So! it is folded, but not cut. Perhaps Mr. Dundonald will do us the favour to cut the leaves while Sir Geoffrey breakfasts; and by-and-by we can, perhaps, find a sheltered

nook somewhere under the rocks, and take it by turns to read aloud."

Delighted to be employed by her, I seized a knife, and prepared to go to work with enthusiasm. But at the first glance at the first page, my enthusiasm vanished. I paused —flushed up to the roots of my hair—and experienced a very decided inclination to sink through the floor, dive into the depths of the ocean, or, in short, do anything that might enable me to interpose the longest possible distance, in the shortest possible time, between myself and my friends.

In this shilling's worth of Waste Paper, I recognised my own stories—my unsuccessful, much ridiculed, luckless stories—the very volumes which I had dedicated with such fatal but ingenious obscurity to Miss Carew!

And they had come to this. They were utterly condemned and rejected, given over to the trunkmaker and the grocer, sold off as

waste stock, and bought by weight at two-pence per pound !

"Well, Phil," said Buchanan, "is the stuff readable ?"

"That is a difficult question to answer of any book at first sight," I replied.

"But does it look as if it might be amusing ?" said Mrs. Macpherson.

"Madam, I have not yet cut a dozen pages."

Sir Geoffrey laughed.

"What a provoking fellow you are, Phil !" said he. "Don't you see that we want you to hazard an opinion of some sort ?"

"Then I adopt Captain Brewer's," I replied, somewhat bitterly. "I have no doubt that it's 'horrid trash,' and that it will be sad waste of time to read it."

"But all our time just now is waste time," said Miss Carew, "so what can we do better than bestow it on waste paper ?"

As she said this with a somewhat peculiar

intonation, I looked up, and found her eyes fixed full upon me.

An hour later, we had carried out our folding chairs to a little recess among the rocks, just out of sight of the cottages—a pleasant, shady, solitary place, facing the open sea, and carpeted under foot with fine white sand. The dashing of the waves, and an occasional sound of hammering on board the yacht, where Sir Geoffrey was making rapid havoc of his invention, alone disturbed the quiet of our retreat.

"Well," said the rector, lazily, "who is to begin?"

Miss Carew selected a few sheets from the pile of papers, and, looking round the circle with her pretty, imperious air, said :—

"Mr. Dundonald shall begin. Nay, sir—no excuses. From the decisions of this court there is no appeal."

"Oh, queen!" I replied, "to hear is to obey."

And so, having first laid the papers on my head in token of humility, I began the first reading.

CHAPTER III.

TERRIBLE COMPANY.

I AM a Frenchman by birth, and my name is François Thierry. I need not weary you with my early history. Enough, that I committed a political offence—that I was sent to the galleys for it—that I am an exile for it to this day. The brand was not abolished in my time. If I chose, I could show you the fiery letters on my shoulder.

I was arrested, tried, and sentenced, in Paris. I went out of the court with my condemnation ringing in my ears. The rumbling wheels of the prison-van repeated it all the way from Paris to Bicêtre that evening, and

all the next day, and the next, and the next, along the weary road from Bicêtre to Toulon. When I look back upon that time, I think I must have been stupefied by the unexpected severity of my sentence, for I remember nothing of the journey, nor of the places where we stopped—nothing but the eternal repetition of "*travaux forcés—travaux forcés—travaux forcés à perpétuité,*" over and over, and over again. Late in the afternoon of the third day, the van stopped, the door was thrown open, and I was conducted across a stone yard, through a stone corridor, into a huge stone hall, dimly lighted from above. Here I was interrogated by a military superintendent, and entered by name in a ponderous ledger bound and clasped with iron, like a book in fetters.

"Number Two Hundred and Seven," said the superintendent. "Green."

They took me into an adjoining room, searched, stripped, and plunged me into a

cold bath. When I came out of the bath, I put on the livery of the galleys—a coarse canvas shirt, trousers of tawny serge, a red serge blouse, and heavy shoes clamped with iron. Last of all, a green woollen cap. On each leg of the trousers, and on the breast and back of the blouse, were printed the fatal letters "T. F." On a brass label in the front of the cap, were engraved the figures "207." From that moment I lost my individuality. I was no longer François Thierry. I was Number Two Hundred and Seven. The superintendent stood by and looked on.

"Come, be quick," said he, twirling his long moustache between his thumb and forefinger. "It grows late, and you must be married before supper."

"Married!" I repeated.

The superintendent laughed, and lighted a cigar, and his laugh was echoed by the guards and jailers.

Down another stone corridor, across another yard, into another gloomy hall, the very counterpart of the last, but filled with squalid figures, busy with the chalk of letters, and pierced at each end with a circular opening, through which a cannon's mouth showed grimly.

"Bring Number Two Hundred and Six," said the superintendent, "and call the police."

Number Two Hundred and Six came from a further corner of the hall, dragging a heavy chain, and along with him a blacksmith, bare-armed and leather-aproned.

"Lie down," said the blacksmith, with an insulting spurn at the dog.

I lay down. A heavy iron ring attached to a chain of eighteen links was then fitted to my ankle, and riveted with the single stroke of the hammer. A second ring next received the disengaged ends of my companion's chain and mine, and was secured in the same

manner. The echo of each blow resounded through the vaulted roof like a hollow laugh.

"Good," said the superintendent, drawing a small red book from his pocket. "Number Two Hundred and Seven, attend to the prison code. If you attempt to escape without succeeding, you will be bastinadoed. If you succeed in getting beyond the port, and are then taken, you will receive three years of double chaining. As soon as you are missed, three cannon shots will be fired, and alarm flags will be hoisted on every bastion. Signals will be telegraphed to the maritime guards, and to the police of the ten neighbouring districts. A price will be set upon your head. Placards will be posted upon the gates of Toulon, and sent to every town throughout the empire. It will be lawful to fire upon you, if you cannot be captured alive."

Having read this with grim complacency, the superintendent resumed his cigar, re-

placed the book in his pocket, and walked away.

All was over now—all the incredulous wonder, the dreamy dulness, the smouldering hope, of the past three days. I was a felon, and (slavery in slavery !) chained to a fellow-felon. I looked up, and found his eyes upon me. He was a swart, heavy-browed, sullen-jawed man of about forty; not much taller than myself, but of immensely powerful build.

"So," said he, "you're for life, are you? So am I."

"How do you know I am for life?" I asked, wearily.

"By that." And he touched my cap roughly with the back of his hand. "Green, for life. Red, for a term of years. What are you in for?"

"I conspired against the Government."

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Devil's mass! Then you're a gentleman-

convict, I suppose! Pity you've not a berth to yourselves—we poor forçats hate such fine company."

"Are there many political prisoners?" I asked, after a moment's pause.

"None, in this department."

Then, as if detecting my unspoken thought, "I am no innocent," he added with an oath. "This is the fourth time I have been here. Did you ever hear of Gasparo?"

"Gasparo the forger?"

He nodded.

"Who escaped three or four months since, and . . ."

"And flung the sentinel over the ramparts, just as he was going to give the alarm. I'm the man."

I had heard of him, as a man who, early in his career, had been sentenced to a prolonged term of solitary imprisonment, and who had come forth from his cell hardened and desperate. I shuddered, and,

as I shuddered, found his evil eye taking vindictive note of me. From that moment he hated me. From that moment I loathed him.

A bell rang, and a detachment of convicts came in from labour. They were immediately searched by the guard, and chained up, two and two, to a sloping wooden platform that reached all down the centre of the hall. Our afternoon meal was then served out, consisting of a mess of beans, an allowance of bread and ship-biscuit, and a measure of thin wine. I drank the wine; but I could eat nothing. Gasparo took what he chose from my untouched allowance, and those who were nearest scrambled for the rest. The supper over, a shrill whistle echoed down the hall, each man took his narrow mattress from under the platform which made our common bedstead, rolled himself in a piece of seaweed matting, and lay down for the night. In less than five minutes all was profoundly silent.

Now and then I heard the blacksmith going round with his hammer, testing the gratings and trying the locks in all the corridors. Now and then the guard stalked past with his musket on his shoulder. Sometimes a convict moaned, or shook his fetters in his sleep. Thus the weary hours went by. My companion slept heavily, and even I lost consciousness at last.

I was sentenced to hard labour. At Toulon the hard labour is of various kinds; such as quarrying, mining, pumping in the docks, lading and unlading vessels, transporting ammunition, and so forth. Gasparo and I were employed with about two hundred other convicts in a quarry a little beyond the port. Day after day, week after week, from seven in the morning until seven at night, the rocks echoed with our blows. At every blow, our chains rang and rebounded on the stony soil. In that fierce climate, terrible tempests and tropical droughts succeed each

other throughout the summer and autumn. Often and often, after toiling for hours under a burning sky, have I gone back to prison and to my pallet, drenched to the skin. Thus the last days of the dreary spring ebbed slowly past; and then the more dreary summer; and then the autumn-time came round.

My fellow-convict was a Piedmontese. He had been a burglar, a forger, an incendiary. In his last escape he had committed manslaughter. Heaven alone knows how my sufferings were multiplied by that abhorred companionship—how I shrank from the touch of his hand—how I sickened if his breath came over me as we lay side by side at night. I strove to disguise my loathing; but in vain. He knew it as well as I knew it, and he revenged himself upon me by every means that a vindictive nature could devise. That he should tyrannise over me was not wonderful; for his physical strength was gigantic, and he was looked upon as an authorised despot

throughout the port; but simple tyranny was the least part of what I had to endure. I had been fastidiously nurtured; he purposely and continually offended my sense of delicacy. I was unaccustomed to bodily labour; he imposed on me the largest share of our daily work. When I needed rest, he would insist on walking. When my limbs were cramped, he would lie down obstinately, and refuse to stir. He delighted to sing blasphemous songs, and relate hideous stories of what he had thought and resolved on in his solitude. He would even twist the chain in such wise that it should gall me at every step. I was at that time just twenty-two years of age, and had been sickly from boyhood. To retaliate, or to defend myself, would have been alike impossible. To complain to the superintendent would only have been to provoke my tyrant to greater cruelty.

There came a day, at length, when his hatred seemed to abate. He allowed me to

rest when our hour of repose came round. He abstained from singing the songs I abhorred, and fell into long fits of abstraction. The next morning, shortly after we had begun work, he drew near enough to speak to me in a whisper.

"François, have you a mind to escape?"

I felt the hot blood rush to my face. I clasped my hands. I could not speak.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"To the death."

"Listen, then. To-morrow, Marshal De La Tour d'Auvergne will visit the port. He will inspect the docks, the prisons, the quarries. There will be plenty of cannonading from the forts and the shipping, and if two convicts escape, a volley more or less will attract no attention round about Toulon. Do you understand?"

"You mean that no one will recognize the signals?"

"Not even the sentries at the town-gate—not even the guards in the next quarry.

Devil's mass! What can be easier than to strike off each other's fetters with the pickaxe when the superintendent is not looking, and the salutes are firing? Will you venture?"

"With my life!"

"A bargain. Shake hands on it."

I had never touched his hand in fellowship before, and I felt as if my own were blood-stained by the contact. I knew by the sullen fire in his glance, that he interpreted my faltering touch aright.

We were roused an hour earlier than usual the following morning, and went through a general inspection in the prison-yard. Before going to work, we were served with a double allowance of wine. At one o'clock we heard the first far-off salutes from the ships of war in the harbour. The sound ran through me like a galvanic shock. One by one the forts took up the signal. It was repeated by the gun-boats closer in shore. Discharge followed discharge, all along the batteries on both sides

of the port, and the air grew thick with smoke.

"As the first shot is fired yonder," whispered Gasparo, pointing to the barracks behind the prison, "strike at the first link of my chain, close to the ankle."

A rapid suspicion flashed across me.

"If I do, how can I be sure that you will free me afterwards? No, Gasparo; you must deal the first blow."

"As you please," he replied, with a laugh and an imprecation.

At the same instant came a flash from the battlements of the barrack close by, and then a thunderous reverberation, multiplied again and again by the rocks around. As the roar burst over our heads, I saw him strike, and felt the fetters fall. Scarcely had the echo of the first gun died away, when the second was fired. It was now Gasparo's turn to be free. I struck, but less skilfully, and had twice to repeat the blow before breaking the stubborn

link. We then went on, apparently with our work, standing somewhat close together, with the chain huddled up between us. No one had observed us, and no one, at first sight, could have detected what we had done. At the third shot, a party of officers and gentlemen made their appearance at the bend of the road leading up to the quarry. In an instant every head was turned in their direction; every felon paused in his work; every guard presented arms. At that moment we flung away our caps and pickaxes, scaled the rugged bit of cliff on which we had been toiling, dropped into the ravine below, and made for the mountain passes that lead into the valley. Encumbered still with the iron anklets to which our chain had been fastened, we could not run very swiftly. To add to our difficulties, the road was uneven, strewn with blocks of fallen granite, and tortuous as the windings of a snake. Suddenly, on turning a sharp angle of projecting cliff, we came

upon a little guard-house and a couple of sentries. To retreat was impossible. The soldiers were within a few yards of us. They presented their pieces, and called to us to surrender. Gasparo turned upon me, like a wolf at bay.

"Curse you!" said he, dealing me a tremendous blow; "stay and be taken! I have always hated you!"

I fell, as if struck down by a sledge hammer, and, as I fell, saw him dash one soldier to the ground, dart past the other, heard a shot, and then . . . all became dark, and I know no more.

When I next opened my eyes, I found myself lying on the floor of a small unfurnished room dimly lighted by a tiny window close against the ceiling. It seemed as if weeks had gone by since I lost consciousness. I had scarcely strength to rise, and, having risen, kept my feet with difficulty. Where my head had lain, the floor was wet with

blood. Giddy and perplexed, I leaned against the wall, and tried to think.

In the first place, where was I? Evidently in no part of the prison from which I had escaped. There, all was solid stone and iron grating; here was only whitewashed lath and plaster. I must be in a chamber of the little guard-house: probably in an upper chamber. Where, then, were the soldiers? Where was Gasparo? Had I strength to clamber up to that window, and if so, in what direction did that window look out? I stole to the door, and found it locked. I listened breathlessly, but could hear no sound either below or above. Creeping back again, I saw that the little window was at least four feet above my head. The smooth plaster offered no projections by which I could raise myself, and there was not even a fireplace in the room from which I could have wrenched a bar to dig out holes in the wall for my feet and hands. Stay! there was my leathern belt, and on the belt the

iron hook which used to sustain my chain when I was not at work. I tore off the hook, picked away the lath and plaster in three or four places, climbed up, opened the window, and gazed out eagerly. Before me, at a distance of not more than thirty-five or forty feet, rose the rugged cliff under whose shelter the guard-house was built; at my feet lay a little kitchen-garden, divided from the base of the rock by a muddy ditch which seemed to run through the ravine; to the right and left, as well as I could judge, lay the rocky path along which our course had been directed. My decision was taken at once. To stay was certain capture; to venture, at all hazards, would make matters no worse. Again I listened, and again all was quiet. I drew myself through the little casement, dropped as gently as I could upon the moist earth, and, crouching against the wall, asked myself what I should do next. To climb the cliff would be to offer myself as a target to the first sol-

dier who saw me. To venture along the ravine, would be, perhaps, to encounter Gasparo and his captors face to face. Besides, it was getting dusk, and, under cover of the night, if I could only conceal myself till then, I might yet escape. But where was that concealment to be found? Heaven be thanked for the thought! There was the ditch!

Only two windows looked out upon the garden from the back of the guard-house. From one of those windows I had just now let myself down, and the other was partly shuttered up. I did not dare, however, openly to cross the garden. I dropped upon my face, and crawled in the furrows between the rows of vegetables, until I came to the ditch. Here the water rose nearly to my waist, but the banks on either side were considerably higher, and, by stooping, I found that I could walk without bringing my head to the level of the road. I thus followed the course of the ditch for some two or three hundred yards in the direc-

tion of Toulon, thinking that my pursuers would be less likely to suspect me of doubling back towards prison, than of pushing forward towards the country. Half lying, half crouching under the rank grasses that fringed the bank above, I then watched the gathering shadows. By-and-by I heard the evening gun, and, a moment after, something like a distant sound of voices. Hark! was that a shout? Unable to endure the agony of suspense, I lifted my head and peeped cautiously out. There were lights moving in the windows of the guard-house—there were dark figures in the garden—there were hasty tramplings of feet upon the road above! Presently a light flashed over the water only a few yards from my hiding-place! I slid gently down at full length, and suffered the foul ooze to close noiselessly over me. Lying thus, I held my breath till the very beatings of my heart seemed to suffocate me, and the veins in my temples were almost bursting. I could bear

it no longer—I rose to the surface—I breathed again—I looked—I listened. All was darkness and silence. My pursuers were gone by!

I suffered an hour to go by, too, before I ventured to move again. By that time it was intensely dark, and had begun to rain heavily. The water in the ditch became a brawling torrent, through which I waded, unheard, past the very windows of a guard-house.

After toiling through the water for a mile or more, I ventured out upon the road again; and so, with the rain and wind beating in my face, and the scattered boulders tripping me up continually, I made my way through the whole length of the winding pass, and came out upon the more open country about midnight. With no other guide than the wind, which was blowing from the north-east, and without even a star to help me, I then struck off to the right, following what seemed to be a rough by-road lying through a valley. By-

the rain abated, and I discerned the outlines of a chain of hills extending all to the left of the road. These, I conjectured must be the Maures. All was well, so I had taken the right direction, and was on my way to Italy.

Desirous to sit down now and then for a moment by the wayside, I never paused throughout the night through. Fatigue and sleep prevented me, it is true, from walking very fast, but the love of liberty was strong, and by keeping steadily on, I was making about eighteen miles an hour. At five o'clock, when day began to dawn, I heard a peal of bells, which I was approaching Frejus. In order to avoid this town, I struck off to the left, at some distance, and continued my journey. The sun had now risen, and as I was hungry, having pulled some grapes as I went along, I took shelter in a hollow

among the hills, and there lay all day in safety. When night again closed in, I resumed my journey, keeping always among the mountains, and coming now and then on grand glimpses of moonlit bays, and tranquil islands lying off the shore; now and then, on pastoral hamlets nestled up among the palmy heights, or on promontories overgrown with the cactus and the aloe. I rested all the second day in a ruined shed at the bottom of a deserted sand-pit, and, in the evening, feeling that I could no longer sustain life without some fitting nourishment, made my way down towards a tiny fishing village on the coast below. It was quite dark by the time I reached the level ground. I walked boldly past the cottages of the fishermen, meeting only an old woman and a little child on the way, and knocked at the curé's door. He opened it himself. I told my story in half a dozen words. The good man believed and pitied me. He gave me food and wine, an old hand-

kerchief to wrap about my head, an old coat to replace my convict's jacket, and two or three francs to help me on my way. I parted from him with tears.

I walked all that night again, and all the next, keeping somewhat close upon the coast, and hiding among the cliffs during the day-time. On the fifth morning, having left Antibes behind me during the night's march, I came to the banks of the Var; crossed the torrent about half a mile below the wooden bridge; plunged into the pine-woods on the Sardinian side of the frontier; and lay down to rest on Italian ground at last!

How, though comparatively safe, I still pursued my journey by the least frequented ways —how I bought a file at the first hamlet to which I came, and freed myself from the iron anklet—how, having lurked about Nice till my hair and beard had grown, I begged my way on to Genoa—how, at Genoa, I hung about the port, earning a scanty live-

lihood by any chance work that I could get, and so struggled, somehow, through the inclement winter—how, towards the early spring, I worked my passage on board a small trader from Genoa to Fiumicino, touching at all the ports along the coast—and how, coming slowly up the Tiber in a barge laden with oil and wine, I landed one evening in March on the Ripetta quay, in Rome; how all these things happened, and what physical hardships I endured in the meanwhile, I have no time here to relate in detail. My object had been to get to Rome, and that object was at last attained. In so large a city, and at so great a distance from the scene of my imprisonment, I was personally safe. I might hope to turn my talents and education to account. I might even find friends among the strangers who would flock thither to the Easter festivals. Full of hope, therefore, I sought a humble lodging in the neighbourhood of the quay, gave up a day or two to the enjoyment of

kerchief to wrap about my head, an[illegible]
to replace my convict's jacket, and
three francs to help me on my way.
from him with tears.

I walked all that night again, an[illegible]
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and hiding among the cliffs duri[illegible]nd
time. On the fifth morning, [illegible]lso
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bridge; plunged into the pi[illegible]e artists
Sardinian side of the frontie[illegible]uptors no
to rest on Italian ground at [illegible]ronomists

How, though comparative[illegible]ne hotel-
ized my journey by the le[illegible]rate all came—
—how I bought a file at [illegible]g my hopes
which I came, and freed [illegible]. Day by
night—how, having le[illegible]ngular on
my hair and beard in[illegible]thought to
my way on to Ge[illegible]or a
hang about the por[illegible]Palace

gladly have
came a day
me but starva-
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ll that afternoon I
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days of the year. The
with black; the bells
oroughfares were crowded
urning. I went into the
Santa Martina. They were
crere, probably with no great
a pathos that seemed to open
rces of my despair.

hat I was, I slept that night under
ch near the theatre of Marcellus.
ning dawned upon a glorious day,
pt out, shivering into the sunshine.
rouched against a bit of warm wall, I
myself wondering more than once how

long it would be worth while to endure the agonies of hunger, and whether the brown waters of the Tiber were deep enough to drown a man. It seemed hard to die so young. My future might have been so pleasant, so honourable! The rough life that I had been leading of late, too, had strengthened me in every way, physically and mentally. I had grown taller. My muscles were more developed. I was twice as active, as energetic, as resolute, as I had been a year before. And of what use were these things to me? I must die, and they could only serve to make me die the harder.

I got up and wandered about the streets, as I had wandered the day before. Once I asked for alms, and was repulsed. I followed mechanically in the stream of carriages and foot passengers, and found myself, by-and-by, in the midst of the crowd that ebbs and flows continually about Saint Peter's during Easter week. Stupefied and weary, I turned aside

into the vestibule of the Sagrestia, and cowered down in the shelter of a doorway. Two gentlemen were reading a printed paper wafered against a pillar close by.

"Good heavens!" said one to the other, "that a man should risk his neck for a few pauls!"

"Ay, and with the knowledge that, out of eighty workmen, six or eight are dashed to pieces every time," added his companion.

"Shocking! Why, that is an average of ten per cent!"

"No less. It is a desperate service."

"But a fine sight," said the first speaker, philosophically; and with this they walked away.

I sprang to my feet, and read the placard with avidity. It was headed, "Illumination of Saint Peter's," and announced that, eighty workmen being required for the lighting of the dome and cupola, and three hundred for the cornices, pillars, colonnade, and so forth,

... was empowered, &c., &c.
..., it stated that every workman
... the dome and cupola should re-
...yment a dinner and twenty-four
... wages of the rest being less than a
... hat sum.

...erate service, it was true; but I was
... man. After all, I could but die,
... is well die after a good dinner as
... I went at once to the *am-*
..., was entered in his list, received
... s as earnest of the contract,
... present myself punctually at
... the following morning. That
... slept at a street stall, and, for a
... obtained leave to sleep on some
... over a stable at the back of the
...

... on the morning of Easter
... I found myself,
... in the midst of a crowd of poor
... I dare say, were as

wretched as myself, waiting at the door of the administrator's office. The piazza in front of the cathedral was like a moving mosaic of life and colour. The sun was shining, the fountains were playing, the flags were flying over Saint Angelo. It was a glorious sight; but I saw it for only a few moments. As the clocks struck the hour, the folding-doors were thrown open, and we passed, in a crowd, into a hall, where two long tables were laid for our accommodation. A couple of sentinels stood at the door; an usher marshalled us, standing, round the tables, and a priest read grace.

As he began to read, a strange sensation came upon me. I felt impelled to look across to the opposite table, and there . . . . yes, by Heaven! there I saw Gasparo!

He was looking full at me, but his eyes dropped on meeting mine. I saw him turn lividly white. The recollection of all he had made me suffer, and of the dastardly blow that he had dealt me on the day of our flight, over-

"*Cospetto!* I know nothing of him; but that he is said to be a wolf and a blasphemer!"

I could learn no more, so I also stretched myself upon the floor, as far as possible from my enemy, and fell profoundly asleep.

At seven, the guards roused those who still slept, and served each man with a small mug of thin wine. We were then formed into a double file, marched round by the back of the cathedral, and conducted up an inclined plane to the roof below the dome. From this point, a long series of staircases and winding passages carried us up between the double walls of the dome; and, at different stages in the ascent, a certain number of us were detached and posted ready for work. I was detached about half-way up, and I saw Gasparo going higher still. When we were all posted, the superintendents came round and gave us our instructions. At a given signal, every man was to pass out through the loophole or window before which he was placed, and seat

himself astride upon a narrow shelf of wood hanging to a strong rope just below. This rope came through the window, was wound round a roller, and secured from within. At the next signal a lighted torch would be put into his right hand, and he was to grasp the rope firmly with his left. At the third signal the rope was to be unwound from within by an assistant placed there for the purpose, he was to be allowed to slide rapidly down over the curve of the dome, and, while thus sliding, was to apply his torch to every lamp he passed in his downward progress.

Having received these instructions, we waited, each man at his window, until the first signal should be given.

It was fast getting dark, and the silver illumination had been lighted since seven. All the great ribs of the dome, as far as I could see; all the cornices and friezes of the façade below; all the columns and parapets of the great colonnade surrounding the piazza four

hundred feet below, were traced out in lines of paper lanterns, the light from which, subdued by the paper, gleamed with a silvery fire which had a magical and wondrous look. Between and among these *lanternoni*, were placed, at different intervals all over the cathedral on the side facing the piazza, iron cups called *padelle*, ready filled with tallow and turpentine. To light those on the dome and cupola, was the perilous task of the *san-pietrini*; when they were all lighted, the golden illumination would be effected.

A few moments of intense suspense elapsed. At every second, the evening grew darker, the *lanternoni* burned brighter, the surging hum of thousands in the piazza and streets below rose louder to our ears. I felt the quickening breath of the assistant at my shoulder—I could almost hear the beating of my heart. Suddenly, like the passing of an electric current, the first signal flew from lip to lip. I got out, and crossed my legs firmly round the

board—with the second signal, I seized the blazing torch—with the third, I felt myself launched, and, lighting every cup as I glided past, saw all the mountainous dome above and below me spring into lines of leaping flame. The clock was now striking eight, and when the last stroke sounded, the whole cathedral was glowing in outlines of fire. A roar, like the roar of a great ocean, rose up from the multitude below, and seemed to shake the very dome against which I was clinging. I could even see the light upon the gazing faces, the crowd upon the bridge of St. Angelo, and the boats swarming along the Tiber.

Having dropped safely to the full length of my rope, and lighted my allotted share of lamps, I was now sitting in secure enjoyment of this amazing scene. All at once, I felt the rope vibrate. I looked up, saw a man clinging by one hand to the iron rod supporting the *padelle*, and with the other . . . . .

Merciful Heaven! It was the Piedmontese firing the rope above me with his torch!

I had no time for thought—I acted upon instinct. It was done in one fearful moment. I clambered up like a cat, dashed my torch full in the felon's face, and grasped the rope an inch or two above the spot where it was burning! Blinded and baffled, he uttered a terrible cry, and dropped like a stone. Through all the roar of the living ocean below, I could hear the dull crash with which he came down upon the leaded roof. Echoing through all the years that have gone by since that night, I hear it now.

I had scarcely drawn breath, when I found myself being hauled up. The assistance came not a moment too soon, for I was sick and giddy with horror, and fainted as soon as I was safe in the corridor. The next day I waited on the *amministratore*, and told him all that had happened. My statement was

corroborated by the vacant rope from which Gasparo had descended, and the burnt fragment by which I had been drawn up. The *amministratore* repeated my story to a prelate high in office; and while none, even of the *sanpietrini*, suspected that my enemy had come by his death in any unusual manner, the truth was whispered from palace to palace until it reached the Vatican. I received much sympathy, and such pecuniary assistance as enabled me to confront the future without fear. Since that time my fortunes have been various. I have lived in many countries, and known many strange adventures; but never, before or since, found myself in such terrible company as on the dome of St. Peter's, that memorable Easter Sunday night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ELEVENTH OF MARCH.

(From a Pocket-book of Forty Years ago.)

FORTY years ago!

An old pocket-book lies before me, bound in scarlet morocco, and fastened with a silver clasp. The leather is mildewed; the silver tarnished; the paper yellow; the ink faded. It has been hidden away at the back of an antique oaken bureau since the last day of the year during which I had it in use; and that was forty years ago. Ay, here is a page turned down—turned down at Wednesday, March the eleventh, eighteen hundred and

twenty-six. The entry against that date is brief and obscure enough.

"Wednesday, March 11th.—Walked from Frascati to Palazzuola, the ancient site of Alba Longa, on the Alban lake. Lodged at Franciscan convent. Brother Geronimo. Dare one rely on the testimony of the senses? *Dieu sait tout.*"

Brief as it is, however, that memorandum fires a train of long-dormant memories, and brings back with painful vividness all the circumstances to which it bears reference. I will endeavour to relate them as calmly and succinctly as possible.

I started on foot from Frascati immediately after breakfast, and rested midway in the shade of a wooded ravine between Marino and the heights of Alba Longa. I seem to remember every trivial incident of that morning walk. I remember how the last year's leaves crackled under my feet, and how the green lizards darted to and fro in the sun-

light. I fancy I still hear the slow drip of the waters that trickled down the cavernous rocks on either hand. I fancy I still smell the heavy perfume of the violets among the ferns. It was not yet noon when I emerged upon the upper ridge, and took the path that leads to Monte Cave. The woodcutters were busy among the chestnut slopes of Palazzuola. They paused at their work, and stared at me [illegible] as I passed by. Presently a little [illegible] of the footway brought the whole lake of [illegible] before my eyes. Blue, silent, solitary, [illegible] round with overhanging woods, it lay in the sunshine, four hundred feet below, like a sapphire at the bottom of a malachite vase. Now and then, a soft breath from the west ruffled the placid mirror, and blurred the pictured landscape on its surface. Now and then, a file of mules, passing unseen among the forest-paths, sent a faint sound of tinkling bells across the lake. I sat down in the shade of a clump of cork-trees, and contem-

plated the panorama. To my left, on a precipitous platform at the verge of the basin, with Monte Cavo towering up behind, stretched the long white façade of the Convent of Palazzuola; on the opposite height, standing clear against the sky, rose the domes and pines of Castel Gondolfo; to the far right, in the blinding sunshine of the Campagna, lay Rome and the Etruscan hills.

In this spot I established myself for the day's sketching. Of so vast a scene, I could, necessarily, only select a portion. I chose the Convent, with its background of mountain, and its foreground of precipice and lake; and proceeded patiently to work out, first the leading features, and next the minuter details of the subject. Thus occupied (with an occasional pause to watch the passing of a cloud-shadow, or listen to the chiming of a distant chapel-bell), I lingered on, hour after hour, till the sun hung low in the west, and the woodcutters were all gone to their homes. I

was now at least three miles from either the town of Albano or the village of Castel Gondolfo, and was, moreover, a stranger to the neighbourhood. I looked at my watch. There remained but one half hour of good daylight, and it was important that I should find my way before the dusk closed in. I rose reluctantly, and, promising myself to return to the same spot on the morrow, packed away my sketch, and prepared for the road.

At this moment, I saw a monk standing in an attitude of meditation upon a little knoll of rising ground some fifty yards ahead. His back was turned towards me; his cowl was up, his arms were folded across his breast. Neither the splendour of the heavens, nor the tender beauty of the earth, was anything to him. He seemed unconscious even of the sunset.

I hurried forward, eager to inquire my nearest path along the woods that skirt the

lake; and my shadow lengthened out fantastically before me as I ran. The monk turned abruptly. His cowl fell. He looked at me, face to face. There were not more than eighteen yards between us. I saw him as plainly as I now see the page on which I write. Our eyes met . . . My God! shall I ever forget those eyes?

He was still young, still handsome, but so lividly pale, so emaciated, so worn with passion, and penance, and remorse, that I stopped involuntarily, like one who finds himself on the brink of a chasm. We stood thus for a few seconds—both silent, both motionless. I could not have uttered a syllable, had my life depended on it. Then, as abruptly as he had turned towards me, he turned away, and disappeared among the trees. I remained for some minutes gazing after him. My heart throbbed painfully. I shuddered, I knew not why. The very air seemed to have grown thick and oppressive; the very sunset, so

golden a moment since, had turned suddenly to blood.

I went on my way, disturbed and thoughtful. The livid face and lurid eyes of the monk haunted me. I dreaded every turn of the path, lest I should again encounter them. I started when a twig fell, or a dead leaf fluttered down beside me. I was almost ashamed of the sense of relief with which I heard the sound of voices some few yards in advance, and, emerging upon an open space close against the convent, saw some half dozen friars strolling to and fro in the sunset. I inquired my way to Albano, and learned that I was still more than two miles distant.

"It will be quite dark before the Signore arrives," said one, courteously. "The Signore would do well to accept a cell at Palazzuola for the night."

I remembered the monk, and hesitated.

"There is no moon now," suggested

another; "and the paths are unsafe for those who do not know them."

While I was yet undecided, a bell rang, and three or four of the loiterers went in.

"It is our supper hour," said the first speaker. "The Signore will at least condescend to share our simple fare; and afterwards, if he still decides to sleep at Albano, one of our younger brethren shall accompany him as far as the Cappucini, at the entrance to the town."

I accepted this proposition gratefully, followed my entertainers through the convent gates, and was ushered into a stone hall, furnished with a long dining table, a pulpit, a clock, a double row of deal benches, and an indifferent copy of the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci. The Superior advanced to welcome me.

"You have come among us, Signore," he said, "on an evening when our table is but poorly provided. Although this is not one

of the appointed fast-days of the Church, we have been abstaining at Palazzuola in memory of certain circumstances connected with our own brotherhood. I hope, however, that our larder may be found to contain something better suited to a traveller's appetite than the fare you now see before you."

Saying thus, he placed me at his right hand at the upper end of the board, and there stood till the monks were all in their places. He then repeated a Latin grace; after which each brother took his seat and began. They were twenty-three in number, twelve on one side, and eleven on the other; but I observed that a place was left vacant near the foot of the table, as if the twelfth man were yet to come. The twelfth, I felt sure, was he whom I had encountered on the way. Once possessed with this conviction, I could not keep from watching the door. Strange! I so dreaded and loathed his coming, that I almost felt as if his presence would be less in-

tolerable than the suspense in which I awaited it!

In the meantime the monks ate in silence; and even the Superior, whose language and address were those of a well-informed man, seemed constrained and thoughtful. Their supper was of the most frugal description, and consisted of only bread, salad, grapes, and maccaroni. Mine was before long reinforced with a broiled pigeon and a flask of excellent Orvieto. I enjoyed my fare, however, as little as they seemed to enjoy theirs. Fasting as I was, I had no appetite. Weary as I was, I only longed to push my plate aside, and resume my journey.

"The Signore will not think of going farther to-night," said the Superior, after an interval of prolonged silence.

I muttered something about being expected at Albano.

"Nay, but it is already dusk, and the sky hath clouded over suddenly within the last

fifteen minutes," urged he. "I fear much that we have a storm approaching. What sayest thou, Brother Antonio?"

"It will be a wild night," replied the brother with whom I had first spoken.

"Ay, a wild night," repeated an old monk, lower down the table; "like this night last year—like this night two years ago!"

The Superior struck the table angrily with his open hand.

"Silence!" he exclaimed authoritatively. "Silence there; and let Brother Anselmo bring lights."

It was now so dark that I could scarcely distinguish the features of the last speaker, or those of the monk who rose and left the room. Again the profoundest silence fell upon all present. I could hear the footsteps of Brother Anselmo echo down the passage, till they died away; and I remember listening vaguely to the ticking of the clock at the farther end

the refectory, and comparing it in my own mind to the horrible beating of an iron heart. Just at that moment a sharp gust of wind moaned past the windows, bearing with it a prolonged reverberation of distant thunder.

"Our storms up here in the mountain are severe and sudden," said the Prior, resuming our conversation at the point where it had been interrupted; "and even the waters of yonder placid lake are sometimes so tempestuous that no boat dare venture across. I fear, Signore, that you will find it impossible to proceed to Albano."

"Should the tempest come up, reverend father," I replied, "I will undoubtedly accept your hospitality, and be grateful for it; but if . . . ."

I broke off abruptly. The words failed on my lips, and I pushed away the flask from which I was about to fill my glass.

Brother Anselmo had brought in the lamps, and there, in the twelfth seat at the opposite

side of the table, sat the monk. I had not seen him take his place. I had not heard him enter. Yet there he sat, pale and death-like, with his burning eyes fixed full upon me! No one noticed him. No one spoke to him. No one helped him to the dishes on the table. He neither ate, nor drank, nor held companionship with any of his fellows; but sat among them like an excommunicated wretch, whose penance was silence and fasting.

"You do not eat, Signore," said the prior.

"I—I thank you, reverend father," I faltered. "I have dined."

"I fear, indifferently. Would you like some other wine? Our cellar is not so ill-furnished as our larder."

I declined by a gesture.

"Then we will retire to my room, and take coffee."

And the Superior rose, repeated a brief Latin thanksgiving, and ushered me into a small well-lighted parlour, opening off a pas-

sage at the upper end of the hall, where there were some half-dozen shelves of books, a couple of easy chairs, a bright wood fire, and a little table laden with coffee and cakes. We had scarcely seated ourselves when a tremendous peal of thunder seemed to break immediately over the convent, and was followed by a cataract of rain.

"The Signore is safer here than on the paths between Palazzuola and Albano," said the Superior, sipping his coffee.

"I am, indeed," I replied. "Do I understand that you had a storm here on the same night last year, and the year before?"

The Prior's face darkened.

"I cannot deny the coincidence," he said, reluctantly; "but it is a mere coincidence, after all. The—the fact is that a very grievous and terrible catastrophe happened to our community on this day two years ago; and the brethren believe that heaven sends the tempest in memory of that event. Monks,

Signore, are superstitious; and if we consider their isolated lives, it is not surprising that they should be so."

I bowed assent. The Prior was evidently a man of the world.

"Now, with regard to Palazzuola," continued he, disregarding the storm, and chatting on quite leisurely, "here are twenty-three brethren, most of them natives of the small towns among the mountains hereabout; and of that twenty-three, not ten have even been so far as Rome in their lives."

"Twenty-three," I repeated. "Twenty-four, surely, *mio padre!*"

"I did not include myself," said the Prior, stiffly.

"Neither did I include you," I replied; "but I counted twenty-four of the order at table just now."

The Prior shook his head.

"No, no, Signore," said he. "Twenty-three only."

"But I am positive," said I.

"And so am I," rejoined he, politely but firmly.

I paused. I was certain. I could not be mistaken.

"Nay, *mio padre*," I said; "they were twenty-three at first; but the brother who came in afterwards made the twenty-fourth."

"Afterwards!" echoed the Prior. "I am not aware that any brother came in afterwards."

"A sickly, haggard-looking monk," pursued I, "with singularly bright eyes—eyes which, I confess, produced on me a very unpleasant impression. He came in just before the lights were brought."

The Prior moved uneasily in his chair, and poured out another cup of coffee.

"Where did you say he sat, Signore?" said he.

"In the vacant seat at the lower end of the table, on the opposite side to myself."

The Prior set down his coffee untasted, and rose in great agitation.

"For God's sake, Signore," stammered he, "be careful what you say! Did you—did you see this? Is this true?"

"True?" I repeated, trembling I knew not why, and turning cold from head to foot. "As true as that I live and breathe! Why do you ask?"

"Sickly and haggard-looking, with singularly bright eyes," said the Prior, looking very pale himself. "Had it—had it the appearance of a young man?"

"Of a young man worn with suffering and remorse," I replied. "But—but it was not the first time, *mio padre!* I saw him before —this afternoon—down near the chestnut-woods, on a knoll of rising ground, overlooking the lake. He was standing with his back to the sunset."

The Prior fell on his knees before a little carved crucifix that hung beside the fireplace.

"REQUIEM ÆTERNAM DONA EIS, DOMINE; ET LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EIS," said he, brokenly.

The rest of his prayer was inaudible, and he remained for some minutes with his face buried in his hands.

"I implore you to tell me the meaning of this," I said, when he at length rose, and sank, still pale and agitated, into his chair.

"I will tell what I may, Signore," he replied; "but I must not tell you all. It is a secret that belongs to our community, and none of us are at liberty to repeat it. Two years ago, one of our brethren was detected in the commission of a great crime. He had suffered, struggled against it, and at last, urged by a terrible opportunity, committed it. His life paid for the offence. One who was deeply wronged by the deed, met him as he was flying from the spot, and slew him as he fled. Signore, the name of that monk was the Fra Geronimo. We buried him where he fell, on a knoll of rising ground close against the chest-

nut woods that border the path to Marino. We had no right to lay his remains in consecrated ground; but we fast, and say masses for his soul, on each anniversary of that fearful day."

The Prior paused and wiped his brow.

"But, *mio padre* . . . " I began.

"This day last year," interrupted he, "one of the woodcutters yonder took a solemn oath that he met the Fra Geronimo on that very knoll at sunset. Our brethren believed the man—but I, heaven forgive me! was incredulous. Now, however . . . "

"Then—then you believe," faltered I, "you believe that I have seen . . . "

"Brother Geronimo," said the Prior, solemnly.

And I believe it too. I am told, perhaps, that it was an illusion of the senses. Granted; but is not such an illusion, in itself, a phenomenon as appalling as the veriest legend that superstition evokes from the world beyond the

grave? How shall we explain the nature of the impression? Whence comes it? By what material agency is it impressed upon the brain? These are questions leading to abysses of speculation before which the sceptic and the philosopher alike recoil—questions which I am unable to answer. I only know that these things came within the narrow radius of my own experience; that I saw them with my own eyes; and that they happened just forty years ago, on the eleventh of March, anno Domini eighteen hundred and twenty-six.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSOR'S STORY.

BETWEEN eight and ten years ago, I embarked in a long vacation campaign among the Alps of Savoy. I was alone. My object was not amusement, but study. I occupy a Professor's Chair, and I was engaged in the collection of materials for a work on the Flora of the higher Alps; and, to this end, travelled chiefly on foot. My route lay far from the beaten paths and passes. I often journeyed for days through regions where there were neither inns nor villages. I often wandered from dawn till dusk among sterile steeps unknown even to

the herdsmen of the upper pasturages, and untrodden save by the chamois and the hunter. I thought myself fortunate at those times if, towards evening, I succeeded in steering my way down to the nearest châlet, where, in company with a half-savage mountaineer and a herd of milch goats, I might find the shelter of a raftered roof, and a supper of black bread and whey.

On one particular evening I had gone farther than usual, in pursuit of the Senecio Unifloris: a rare plant, which I had hitherto believed indigenous to the southern valleys of Monte Rosa, but of which I here succeeded in finding one or two indifferent specimens. It was a wild and barren district, difficult to distinguish with any degree of precision on the map; but lying among the upper defiles of the Val de Bagnes, between the Mont Pleureur and the Grand Combin. On the waste of rock-strewn moss to which I had climbed, there was no sign of human habita-

tion. Above me lay the great ice-fields of Corbassière, surmounted by the silver summits of the Graffenière and Combin. To my left, the sun was going down rapidly behind a forest of smaller peaks, the highest of which, as well as I could judge from Osterwald's map, was the Mont Blanc de Cheilon. In ten minutes more those peaks would be crimson; in one short half hour, it would be night.

To be benighted on an Alpine plateau towards the latter end of September is not a desirable position. I knew it by recent experience, and had no wish to repeat the experiment. I therefore began retracing my route as rapidly as I could, descending in a north-westerly direction, and keeping a sharp look-out for any châlet that might offer a shelter for the night. Pushing forward thus, I found myself presently at the head of a little verdant ravine, channelled, as it were, in the face of the plateau. I hesitated. It seemed, through the gathering darkness, as if

I could discern vague traces of a path trampled here and there in the deep grass. It also seemed as if the ravine trended down towards the upper pastures which were my destination. By following it I could scarcely go wrong. Where there is grass, there are generally cattle and a châlet; and I might possibly find a nearer resting-place than I had anticipated. At all events, I resolved to try it.

The ravine proved shorter than I had expected, and, instead of leading immediately downward, opened upon a second plateau, through which a well-worn footway struck off abruptly to the left. Pursuing this footway with what speed I might, I came, in the course of a few more minutes, to a sudden slope, at the bottom of which, in a basin almost surrounded by gigantic limestone cliffs, lay a small dark lake, a few fields, and a châlet. The rose-tints had by this time come and gone, and the snow had put on that

ghostly grey which precedes the dark. Before I could descend the slope, skirt the lake, and mount the little eminence on which the house stood, sheltered by its background of rocks, it was already night, and the stars were in the sky.

I went up to the door and knocked; no one answered. I opened the door; all was dark. I paused—held my breath—listened—fancied I could distinguish a low sound, as of some one breathing. I knocked again. My second knock was followed by a quick noise, like the pushing back of a chair, and a man's voice said, hoarsely:—

"Who is there?"

"A traveller," I replied, "seeking shelter for the night."

A heavy footstep crossed the floor, a sharp flash shot through the darkness, and I saw, by the flickering tinder, a man's face bending over a lantern. Blowing lighted it, he said, with scarce a glance towards the door, "Enter,

traveller," and went back to his stool beside the empty hearth.

I entered. The châlet was of a better sort than those usually found at so great an altitude, consisting of a dairy and houseplace, with a loft overhead. A table and three or four wooden stools occupied the centre of the room. The rafters were hung with bunches of dried herbs, and long strings of Indian corn. A clock ticked in a corner; a kind of rude pallet upon trestles stood in a recess beside the fireplace; and through a lattice at the further end, I could hear the cows feeding in the outhouse beyond.

Somewhat perplexed by the manner of my reception, I unstrapped my knapsack and specimen-box, took possession of the nearest stool, and asked if I could have supper?

My host looked up, with the air of a man intent on other things. I repeated the inquiry.

"Yes," he said, wearily; "you can eat, traveller."

With this, he crossed to the other side of the hearth, stooped over a dark object, which until now I had not observed, crouched in the corner, and muttered a word or two of unintelligible patois. The object moaned; lifted up a white bewildered woman's face; and rose slowly from the floor. The herdsman pointed to the table, and went back to his stool and his former attitude. The woman, after pausing helplessly, as if in the effort to remember something, went out into the dairy, came back with a brown loaf and a pan of milk, and set them before me on the table.

As long as I live I shall never forget the expression of that woman's face. She was young, and very pretty; but her beauty seemed turned to stone. Every feature bore the seal of an unspeakable terror. Every gesture was mechanical. In the lines that furrowed her brow there was a haggardness more terrible than the haggardness of age. In the locking of her lips there was an anguish

beyond the utterance of words. Though she served me, I do not think she saw me. There was no recognition in her eyes; no apparent consciousness of any object or circumstance external to the secret of her own despair. All this I noticed during the few brief moments in which she brought me my supper. That done, she crept away, abjectly, into the same dark corner, and sank down again, a mere huddled heap of clothing.

As for her husband, there was something unnatural in the singular immobility of his attitude. There he sat, his body bent forward, his chin resting on his palms, his eyes staring fixedly at the blackened hearth, and not even the involuntary quiver of a nerve to show that he lived and breathed. I could not determine his age, analyse and observe his features as I might. He looked old enough to be fifty, and young enough to be forty; and was a fine muscular mountaineer, with that grave cast of countenance

which is peculiar to the Valaisan peasant.

I could not eat. The keenness of my mountain appetite was gone. I sat, as if fascinated, in the presence of this strange pair; observing both, and apparently by both as much forgotten as if I had never crossed their threshold. We remained thus, by the dim light of the lantern, and the monotonous ticking of the clock, for some forty minutes or more: all profoundly silent. Sometimes the woman stirred, as if in pain; sometimes the cows struck their horns against the manger in the outhouse. The herdsman alone sat motionless, like a man cast in bronze. At length the clock struck nine. I had by this time become so nervous that I almost dreaded to hear my own voice interrupt the silence. However, I pushed my plate noisily aside, and said, with as much show of ease as I could muster:—

"Have you any place, friend, in which I can sleep to-night?"

He shifted his position uneasily, and, without looking round, replied in the same form of words as before :

" Yes ; you can sleep, traveller."

" Where ? In the loft above ?"

He nodded affirmatively, took the lantern from the table, and turned towards the dairy. As we passed, the light streamed for a moment over the crouching figure in the corner.

" Is your wife ill ?" I asked, pausing and looking back.

His eyes met mine for the first time, and a shudder passed over his body.

" Yes," he said, with an effort. " She is ill."

I was about to ask what ailed her, but something in his face arrested the question on my lips. I know not, to this hour, what that something was. I could not define it then ; I cannot describe it now ; but I hope I may never see it in a living face again.

I followed him to the foot of a ladder at the further end of the dairy.

"Up there," he said; placed the lantern in my hand; and strode heavily back into the darkness.

I went up, and found myself in a long low granary, stored with corn-sacks, hay, onions, rock-salt, cheeses, and farming implements. In one corner were the unusual luxuries of a mattress, a rug, and a three-legged stool. My first care was to make a systematic inspection of the loft and all that it contained; my next, to open a little unglazed lattice with a sliding shutter, just opposite my bed. The night was brilliant, and a stream of fresh air and moonlight poured in. Oppressed by a strange undefined sense of trouble, I extinguished the lantern, and stood looking out upon the solemn peaks and glaciers. Their solitude seemed to me more than usually awful; their silence more than usually profound. I could not help associating them, in some vague way,

with the mystery in the house. I perplexed myself with all kinds of wild conjectures as to what the nature of that mystery might be. The woman's face haunted me like an evil dream. Again and again, I went from the lattice to the ladder, and from the ladder back to the lattice, vainly listening for any sound in the rooms below. A long time went by thus, until at length, overpowered by the fatigues of the day, I stretched myself on the mattress, took my knapsack for a pillow, and fell fast asleep.

I can guess neither how long my sleep lasted, nor from what cause I awoke. I only know that my sleep was dreamless and profound; and that I started from it suddenly, unaccountably, trembling in every nerve, and possessed by an overwhelming sense of danger.

Danger! Danger of what kind? From whom? From whence? I looked round—I was alone, and the quiet moon was shining in

as serenely as when I fell asleep. I listened —all was as still as when I fell asleep. I got up, walked to and fro, reasoned with myself; but all in vain. I could not stay the beatings of my heart. I could not master the horror that oppressed my brain. I felt that I dared not lie down again; that I must get out of the house somehow, and at once; that to stay would be death; that the instinct by which I was governed must at all costs be obeyed.

I could not bear it. Resolved to escape, or, at all events, to sell life dearly, I strapped on my knapsack, armed myself with my iron-headed Alpenstock, took my large clasp knife between my teeth, and began, cautiously and noiselessly, to descend the ladder. When I was about half-way down, the Alpenstock, which I had been keeping studiously clear of the ladder, encountered some dairy vessel, and sent it, clattering, to the ground. Caution, after this, was useless. I sprang forward, reached the outer room at a bound, and found

it, to my amazement, deserted, with the door wide open and the moonlight streaming in. Suspecting a trap, my first impulse was to stand still, with my back against the wall, prepared for a desperate defence. All was silent. I could only hear the ticking of the clock, and the heavy beating of my own heart. The pallet was empty. The bread and milk were still standing where I had left them on the table. The herdsman's stool occupied the same spot by the desolate hearth. But he and his wife were gone—gone in the dead of night—leaving me, a stranger, in the sole occupation of their home!

While I was yet irresolute whether to go or stay, and while I was yet wondering at the strangeness of my position, I heard, or fancied I heard, something—something that might have been the wind, save that there was no air stirring—something that might have been the wailing of a human voice. I held my breath—heard it again—followed it as it died

away. . . . I had not far to go. A line of light gleaming under the door of a shed at the back of the châlet, and a cry bitterer and more piercing than any I had yet heard, guided me direct to the spot.

I looked in—recoiled, giddy with horror—went back, as if fascinated; and so stood for some moments, unable to move, to think, to do anything but stare helplessly upon the scene before me. To this day, I cannot recall it without something of the same sickening sensation.

Inside that hut, by the light of a pine-torch thrust into an iron sconce against the wall, I saw the herdsman kneeling by the body of his wife; grieving over her like another Othello; kissing her white lips, wiping blood-stains from her yellow hair, raving out inarticulate cries of passionate remorse, and calling down all the curses of Heaven upon his own head, and the head of some other man who had brought this crime upon him! I understood it all

now—all the mystery, all the terror, all the despair. She had sinned against him, and he had slain her. She was quite dead. The very knife, with its hideous testimony fresh upon the blade, lay near the door.

I turned and fled—blindly, wildly, like a man with bloodhounds on his track; now stumbling over stones; now torn by briars; now pausing a moment to take breath; now rushing forward faster than before; now battling up-hill with straining lungs and trembling limbs; now staggering across a level space; now making for the higher ground again, and casting never a glance behind! At length I reached a bare plateau above the line of vegetation, where I dropped exhausted. Here I lay for a long time, beaten and stupefied, until the intense cold of approaching dawn forced upon me the necessity of action. I rose, and looked round on a scene no feature of which was familiar to me. The very snow-peaks, though

I knew they must be the same, looked unlike the peaks of yesterday. The very glaciers, seen from a different point of view, assumed new forms, as if on purpose to baffle me. Thus perplexed, I had no resource but to climb the nearest height from which it was probable that a general view might be obtained. I did so, just as the last belt of purple mist turned golden in the east, and the sun rose.

A superb panorama lay stretched before me, peak beyond peak, glacier beyond glacier, valley and pine forest and pasture slope, all flushed and palpitating in the crimson vapours of the dawn. Here and there I could trace the foam of a waterfall, or the silver thread of a torrent; here and there the canopy of faint blue smoke that wavered upward from some hamlet among the hills. Suddenly my eyes fell upon a little lake—a sullen pool—lying in the shade of an amphitheatre of rocks some eight hundred feet below. Until that moment the night and its terrors appeared to

have passed away like a wicked vision; but now the very sky seemed darkened above me. Yes—there it all lay at my feet. Yonder was the path by which I had descended from the plateau, and, lower still, the accursed châlet, with its background of rugged cliff and over hanging precipice. Well might they lie in shadow! Well might the sunlight refuse to touch the ripples of that lake with gold, and to light up the windows of that house with an illumination direct from heaven!

Thus standing, thus looking down, I became aware of a strange sound—a sound singularly distinct, but far away—a sound sharper and hollower than the fall of an avalanche, and unlike anything that I remembered to have heard. While I was yet asking myself what it could be, or whence it came, I saw a considerable fragment of rock detach itself from one of the heights overhanging the lake, bound rapidly from ledge to ledge, and fall, with a heavy plash, into the water below. It was

followed by a cloud of dust, and a prolonged reverberation, like the rolling of distant thunder. Next moment, a dark fissure sprang into sight all down the face of the precipice—the fissure became a chasm—the whole cliff wavered before my eyes—wavered, parted, sent up a cataract of earth and stones—and slid slowly down—down—down into the valley.

Deafened by the crash, and blinded by the dust, I covered my face with my hands, and anticipated instant destruction. The echoes, however, died away, and were succeeded by a solemn silence. The plateau on which I stood remained firm and unshaken. I looked up. The sun was shining as serenely, the landscape sleeping as peacefully as before. Nothing was changed, save that a wide white scar now defaced all one side of the great limestone basin below, and a ghastly mound of ruin filled the valley at its foot. Beneath that mound lay buried all record of the crime to which I had

been an unwilling witness. The very mountains had come down and covered it—nature had obliterated it from the face of the Alpine solitude. Lake and châlet, victim and executioner, had disappeared for ever, and the place thereof knew them no more.

CHAPTER VI.

BRADSHAW THE BETRAYER.

Oh. Dorcicles! your praises are too large.

Winter's Tale.

I AM a conscientious traveller, and I believe in Mr. Murray. I visit all the churches, climb all the mountains, admire all the pictures and put up at all the inns which he recommends to my notice. When he predicts that "the traveller will behold with a shudder the boiling torrent which plunges beneath his feet to a depth of, &c. &c.," I peep over the precipice and shudder accordingly. When he kindly observes that "the traveller will here leave the carriage, and, by ascending the bank

at the bend of the road, be delighted with a most extensive and beautiful prospect," I get out, and am delighted on the spot. In short, Mr. Murray tells me what is proper to be done, and I do it; which saves a great deal of trouble, and secures me against anything like misplaced enthusiasm.

There was also a time when I believed in Mr. Bradshaw, and pinned my faith upon the "Continental Railway Guide;" but that dream is over. Faithless Bradshaw! an impartial public shall decide our grievance.

It was between four and six years ago. I had been all about the Pyrenees, and a little way into Spain, and was now jogging homeward by easy stages through the north of France. Travelling alternately by rail and diligence, and occasionally settling down in some large town for the sake of exploring the neighbourhood, I came one day to the city of Abbeville, and took up my quarters at the hotel *Tête de Bœuf*.

"Mine inn" was spacious and gloomy; my bed-room spacious and gloomy; my bed a catafalque with dusty amber satin hangings. There were faded frescoes on all the walls. There was a smell of damp earth in all the passages. Everything was dismal. Everything was decaying. The very waiter looked grey and mouldy, as if he had been laid aside somewhere and forgotten, till the moment of my arrival.

I sat down amid my luggage, and sighed. The waiter sighed likewise.

"Anything to be seen in this town?" I asked, despondingly.

The waiter stroked his chin, and eyed me contemplatively.

"The Cathedral, M'sieur."

"Nothing but the Cathedral?"

"The city, M'sieur."

"Oh!" said I, "the Cathedral and the city. Anything else?"

He coughed, dusted a chair, and affected

not to hear. I always know what that sort of deafness means. I am a traveller, and used to it. There was a long pause.

"When can I dine?" I inquired at last.

"Table-d'hôte at six, M'sieur," sighed the waiter.

I glanced at my watch, and found that it wanted ten minutes to four.

"Very well," said I, resignedly. "I will stroll about till six."

Whereupon my melancholy friend bowed me downstairs, and into the courtyard.

A few steps brought me to the Cathedral. It was grey and shadowy, and vast, and quite bare of decorations. There was a triangular stand of votive tapers flickering and guttering in one corner, and a very old peasant woman on her knees before the altar. I sat down on a stone bench, and fell into a musing contemplation of the stained glass oriel, and the long perspective of the pillared aisles. Presently the verger came out of the vestry-

room. He was a short, plump, inquisitive-looking man, with a loose black gown, and slender black legs, and a pointed nose. He laid his head on one side, looked at me with one glittering eye, and picked his way daintily across the church towards where I was sitting. Altogether he was very like a raven.

"*Bonjour*, Monsieur," said he, with fluent politeness, and just the sort of croaking voice that suited his general appearance. "Monsieur is a stranger. Monsieur admires the Cathedral. *Bien!* Monsieur has discernment, and the Cathedral is superb. We have nothing finer in France, Monsieur. Our tracery is unique; our nave is admirable; our stained glass is of the first quality, and upwards of six centuries old. Before the high altar of this Cathedral, Monsieur, our good King Louis XII., surnamed the father of his people, married Madame la Princesse Mary of England."

"Yes, and died of gaiety and late hours in

less than half-a-year," said I. "A pretty lesson to old gentlemen of seventy-three who marry young ladies of nineteen!"

"*Plait-il*?" croaked the verger, greatly puzzled; for this part of the story was not included in his lesson.

"And have you nothing to show?" I asked. "No remarkable tombs?—no pictures?—no statues?"

The verger fixed a knowing eye upon me, and looked more bird-like than ever.

"The treasury, Monsieur; the episcopal jewels; the relics, the inestimable relics! The great toe of Saint Celestine of Cressy, and the tongs with which St. Dunstan took the devil by the nose. Tickets at two francs each."

"Lead the way," said I, pulling out my two francs: "lead the way, and hand over the ticket. Let us see the inestimable relics!"

But instead of leading the way, he drew back, and hesitated.

"Unfortunately," said he, "the treasury cannot be shown to fewer than five persons. If Monsieur has friends in Abbeville, or if Monsieur has no objection to pay for the five tickets——"

"Pay for five tickets, indeed!" I echoed, indignantly. "Ten francs for St. Dunstan's tongs, and St. Somebody's toe! I would not buy them at the price!"

The verger shrugged his shoulders, and considered.

"There were two pious pilgrims here this morning," he said, "both devoutly desirous of admission. They will return to-morrow; and, if Monsieur will leave me his address, it is possible that we may be enabled, between this and then, to make up the party."

I scribbled the name of my hotel on the back of my card, left it in his keeping, and wandered out again into the streets.

I cannot say that I was delighted with

Abbeville. Mr. Murray did not insist that I should be, and I had left Mr. Bradshaw locked up in my portmanteau. The squares were grass-grown, the canals were foul and weedy, the public buildings were dirty and dilapidated, and the houses all looked as if they had turned their backs to the streets. It may be gloriously picturesque, and I have no doubt that it was a charming town in the estimation of Samuel Prout, Esquire; but, for my own part, I am not enthusiastic about gutters and gables, and object to a population composed exclusively of old women.

I found myself at six o'clock in a desert of dining-room with an oasis of table. I was the only guest. It was a dismal meal; the mouldy waiter attended upon me; and I had bad dreams in the catafalque all night long.

While I was breakfasting the next morning, I received a message from my friend the verger. Another traveller had turned up; the pilgrims were still anxious for a sight of

the relics; and the authorities consented for once to open the treasury-doors in favour of four.

Punctual as I was to the time appointed, the pilgrims were there before me—a pair of stalwart, broad-shouldered, barefooted Capuchins, odorous of garlic and cognac. One had a patch across his eye; the other was lame, and wore a bandage round his ankle. Both kept their hoods well over their faces, and neither was exactly the sort of mendicant that one would prefer to meet towards dusk upon a lonely road among the mountains.

The fourth traveller had not yet arrived; so I returned to the stone seat of yesterday, and the Capuchins paced up and down before the treasury door, conversing in whispers. Thus five—ten—fifteen minutes went by, and the chimes jangled at the quarter.

The pilgrims, who had been glancing up at the clock every half-dozen seconds or so

all the time, now grew more and more impatient.

"*Ce diable de voyageur!* will he never come?" was the overloud and somewhat irreverent exclamation of the monk with the patch.

His companion shrugged his shoulders, glanced hurriedly in my direction, and muttered some inaudible reply.

I rose, and went towards them.

"I fear," said I, "that we shall all be disappointed this morning; for the treasury cannot be seen after midday, and it now wants but twenty minutes to the hour.

The pilgrims groaned, and wagged their heads simultaneously.

"We are poor servants of the church," said the former speaker, crossing himself with great humility. "We are making a pilgrimage to all the *objets saints* of the department. It is a great delay to us, Monsieur—a melancholy delay!"

"And a spiritual privation, Brother Ambroise," added the other, with a profound sigh.

"Ay, a spiritual privation, indeed," echoed Brother Ambroise. "Holy things are meat and drink to miserable sinners such as we."

I murmured a civil assent: but could not help thinking in my own mind that such bulky saints could scarcely be indifferent to meats and drinks of a merely temporal nature.

"Have you been long on this pilgrimage?" I asked, not knowing what next to say.

"Twenty days, Monsieur," replied Brother Ambroise. "Twenty days, during which we have journeyed upon foot, and entirely depended upon the alms of the charitably disposed."

This was a broad hint; but I determined not to observe it.

"Twenty days is a long time," said I.

"You must have visited a great many towns, and seen a great many churches, in the course of your journey."

"Oh, a great many—thanks to the holy saints! a great many," replied the Capuchins, wagging their heads together as before.

"You have been to Amiens, of course?"

They looked at each other, and hesitated.

"Ye—yes, we have been to Amiens," said Brother Ambroise, with another glance at the clock. "And we are on our way to—to—"

"Boulogne," interposed his companion, promptly.

"Exactly so, Brother Paul. To Boulogne —Ah! *les voici!*"

His quick ear had caught the echo of approaching footsteps, and there, sure enough, came the verger, picking his steps up the centre aisle, followed by a slim young gentleman, with fair hair, blue glasses, a note-book, and an umbrella.

The former carried a huge bunch of keys,

"Up—p—pon my word, that's very curious!" ejaculated the slim tourist, who had an impediment in his speech, and was already at work upon the note-book. "I must p—p—put that down. What year did you say—1527?"

But the raven jingled his keys with dignified indifference, and stalked on to press number two: whereupon 1527 went down as the date of an interesting historical anecdote of the middle ages.

"You now behold," continued he, with a wave of the hand, "the reliquary of St. Celestine de Cressy. This valuable shrine was presented to us in the year 1630, by Monseigneur le Cardinal Richelieu. It is of silver gilt, enriched with precious stones; and measures one foot and a half in length, by eight inches in height. I open the lid, and the object which you perceive enclosed in a small glass box is the most sacred toe of the saint and martyr before-mentioned."

and proceeded pompously to unlock the treasury door: the latter, who had been the cause of the delay, began murmuring a torrent of explanations and apologies, to which nobody listened. The chimes jangled another quarter —the last bolt was drawn—and in another moment we found ourselves standing in the midst of a large, ill-lighted apartment, surrounded by presses and glass cases, and decorated with a huge black crucifix at the farther end.

"Messieurs—reverend pilgrims," croaked the raven, unlocking press number one, and beginning with a bow to his audience, "you here see the breviary used by His Majesty King Charles X., when he visited our Cathedral in the year 1827, and the cushion pressed by His Majesty's royal knees. Also an embroidered glove worn by His Majesty during the service, and found near His Majesty's chair, after His Majesty and His Majesty's royal suite had left the church."

lini; a statue of St. Barnabas, in solid silver, five inches and a half in height; a very ancient crozier-head, silver gilt; a patera, of antique Byzantine workmanship, enamelled, and of great value. We were offered seven thousand francs for this beautiful work of art, not many years since, but declined to part with it."

The one eye of Brother Ambroise glittered with pious fervour.

"Oh, Brother Paul," said he, emphatically, "is not this a consoling sight? Ought we not to rejoice in the riches of our beloved Church?"

Whereupon Brother Paul cast an enthusiastic glance at the ceiling, struck himself on the breast with both his fists, and said,—

"Ay, indeed, Brother Ambroise; but should we not at the same time be thankful that these things possess no attraction for us? Is it not the glory of our order that we love poverty better than riches, fasting better than feasting,

and wooden platters better than all the gold and silver vessels in the world?"

"Verily we do!" responded Brother Ambroise with a groan of humble satisfaction. "Verily we do!"

Here the verger, who had been listening with his head on one side, drew a deep sigh of admiration, and with especial ceremony unlocked press number four.

"You are now about to see the greatest treasure that we possess," said he; "the crowning glory of our collection, Messieurs—the pride of Abbeville—the envy and delight of surrounding districts!"

The Capuchins uttered a simultaneous "Ah!" and pressed to the front. The raven flung open the doors, pointed to a shapeless fragment of rusty iron reposing on a crimson velvet cushion, fell into an attitude, and in a tone of modest triumph announced—

"The tongs with which St. Dunstan took the devil by the nose!"

The pilgrims drew back in silence. It might be my profane fancy; but they certainly looked disappointed. Not so the energetic tourist. He protested that the thing was "m—m—marvellous!" and entreated five minutes delay, to make a sketch of the interesting object.

The verger consented, a chair was brought, and the artist began.

"If I had but a piece of India-rubber and a d—d—double B!" sighed he.

"I think," observed Brother Paul with great alacrity, "that the gentleman should have more light! Would it not be possible, my son, to draw that blind higher?"

The verger, thus paternally addressed, deposited his keys on the table, muttered something about "notions," mounted a little set of library steps, and complied. At that instant Brother Paul was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and Brother Ambroise, passing beside the table, took the keys up carelessly in his hand.

The blind was obstinate, and, instead of going up, came down with a run. When it was at last arranged, the Cathedral bell was ringing for service, and long before the tourist had shaded his sketch to his own satisfaction, the verger declared that we could stay no longer.

"Let us return thanks to our patron saint, Brother Ambroise!" ejaculated the lame pilgrim; "for our replenishment of spirit has been great."

Whereupon Brother Ambroise devoutly kissed and returned the keys, and gave the verger his blessing.

It was a cheap donation, and neither my stammering countryman nor I got off so easily. The people were assembling for mass as we went out. The Capuchins went one way—the stranger and I another. He was all admiration of what he had seen, what he had not seen, and what he was going to see.

"B—b—beautiful country!" said he.

"B—b—beautiful churches—interesting nation! I'm going to P—P—Paris to-morrow."

"Ah," said I with a yawn—"you'll be delighted with Paris."

"I know I shall," replied he. "I'm going to write a b—b—book about it. Good morning!"

"Good morning," said I, and returned to mine inn to breakfast.

Sitting over that desolate meal, I asked myself what was next to be done? Abbeville was "used up." I had seen the Cathedral, and I had seen the town, and even Mr. Murray confessed that the tourist could do no more. I had also an objection to pass another night in the catafalque. To go I had determined; but the question was—where? In this emergency I recollected that I had not yet consulted Mr. Bradshaw, so I sought out the "Continental Railway Guide" from the substrata of my portmanteau, turned to page 185, and read as follows:—

"ABBEVILLE.—A fortified town, containing about 18000 inhabitants, situated on the river Somme, twelve miles from the beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme."

"The beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme!" I repeated, aloud. "Why, 'tis the very thing! Blessed be the name of Bradshaw—I'll go this afternoon! Waiter—Kellner—garçon! What conveyances are there to St. Valery-sur-Somme?"

"To St. Valery?" repeated the waiter, regarding me with an air of melancholy surprise. "Monsieur is going to St. Valery?"

I nodded impatiently.

"Monsieur has friends at St. Valery?"

"Friends! not I."

"Business, perhaps?"

"No—nor business either. I'm going for pleasure—to see the place. How does that concern you, pray?"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

"*Je vous demande pardon, M'sieur.* I—I but inquired. There is nothing to see at St. Valery, M'sieur. Nothing whatever. But M'sieur is the best judge."

I cast an affectionate eye at the "Continental Railway Guide," page 185.

"Nothing to see, indeed!" said I, with quiet triumph. "There are the beauties of nature—there is a picturesque old town—there is exquisite sketching. Bah! I should not wonder if I stayed there till the end of the month!"

The waiter looked down incredulously, and the dismallest ghost of a smile flitted across his countenance. It was evident that *he* had no soul for the picturesque!

"As Monsieur pleases," said he, submissively. "Monsieur was enquiring . . . "

"About the conveyances! Well?"

"Well, Monsieur, there is a passage-boat daily, by the river. That goes at mid-day.

There is also a *cabriolet de poste.* That goes at ten o'clock every morning."

"And there is nothing going this afternoon?"

"Nothing; unless Monsieur chooses a *voiture particulière.* We have an excellent travelling carriage at Monsieur's disposal."

Having, however, no fancy for a trip *en grand seigneur,* I decided to wait till to-morrow; and so went out to inquire into the comparative merits of the passage-boat and the cabriolet.

There was something very refreshing in the idea of a water journey.

I recalled all my joyous boatings up the Medway and the Thames; my adventures on the Rhine and the Moselle; my feats and failures on the Cam in college days long since gone by; and thus pleasantly running over my "rambles by rivers," made my way towards that part of the Somme called the *Rive des Bateaux.*

It was a dismal spot just within the fortifications. To the left lay the city; to the right, high embankments, a drawbridge, a stretch of flat country, and a long perspective of canal-like river bordered by files of monotonous poplars. The first object that met my eyes was the passage-boat moored up beside a tiny wooden landing-place. It was a heavy, square-built, green and yellow boat, with a dirty little pavilion at the poop. The interior of this pavilion was furnished with benches, and lit by a row of little windows all the way round. On a shelf of deck near the prow sat some three or four grimy men, cooking their dinner over a brazier; and between this shelf and the pavilion the boat was laden with wood, hay, charcoal, and market produce. Altogether it was by no means an inviting conveyance, and looked more like a coal barge with a shabby omnibus on deck than anything else that I can think of.

While I was yet observing these things, a fat official, with a gold band to his cap, rolled lazily out of a little red bureau attached to the quay, and hung out a tariff of the tolls and rates of conveyance.

"Pray when does this boat leave," I asked; "and how long does it take to go from here to St. Valery?"

The fat official brought a huge cigar out of his pocket, stabbed it deliberately with a pin in two places, and stuck it in his mouth before replying.

"Starts at midday *précis*," said he. "Arrives between six and seven."

"Six hours to travel twelve miles!" I exclaimed. "Surely there must be some mistake!"

"Fourteen miles by the river," replied he, phlegmatically. "Nine stations."

"And the fare?"

"Pavilion, seven francs: deck, four."

I hesitated, looked again at the boat, and

thought it uglier and more uncomfortable than before.

"And is the scenery interesting?" I inquired, presently.

"*Plaît-il?*" said the fat official, looking somewhat puzzled.

"The—the river, you know! Is it pretty? Is there anything to see?"

He sucked silently at his cigar, turned a fishy eye upon me, stared languidly up the stream and down the stream, and finally pointed with his thumb towards the perspective of poplars.

"*C'est bien,*" said he, with placid satisfaction; "*c'est très bien, cette rivière-ci.* It is just like this all the way."

"Just like this all the way!" I repeated, drawing a deep breath. "*In*-deed! Then I wish you a very good day."

The official touched his cap with one finger, and closed his eyes, which was the nearest approach to a bow that he could take the

trouble to make. Whereupon we parted—that is to say, he remained where he was, and I strode indignantly away.

"I will go by the *cabriolet de poste*," I muttered to myself as I went along. "I shall go early, and I shall go quickly, and I dare say the road is delightful!"

The *Bureau des Messageries* was just opposite my hotel, and the office was occupied by a very pretty young girl, a cat, and a canary. I took off my hat, and was greeted with a smile and a curtsey.

"Will Mademoiselle be so kind as to inform me of the earliest departure for St. Valery?" I asked, with my best French air and accent.

"The *cabriolet* leaves at ten to-morrow morning, and the fare is eleven francs," replied the young lady, with great politeness.

I laid the money on the table. She entered my name in the ledger, and handed me a small green ticket.

"Mademoiselle is acquainted with St. Valery?" I ventured timidly to inquire.

Mademoiselle looked down, coquetted with the corner of her apron, and admitted that she had frequently visited the place in question.

"And Mademoiselle was pleased with the town—found it picturesque and agreeable?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and arched her eyebrows as only a Frenchwoman can.

"*Ma foi! non*, Monsieur," said she. "It is *triste*—miserably *triste!*"

"By *triste*," said I, "you would imply retired; but a place may be retired and very lovely at the same time. I have heard that St. Valery is charming."

"*Vraiment?*"

"Ah, Mademoiselle is of a different opinion!"

She smiled, and shook her head with the air of a person who is too polite to offer a contradiction.

"*Pardon,*" said she. "I do not doubt that Monsieur's information is correct. Tastes are so different!"

"And appearances so deceptive," added I to myself, as I walked out of the bureau. "That girl is pretty and vivacious; but she has no mind. After all, however, one need never hope to find localities appreciated by those who live upon the spot. The Romans quarried the Coliseum for building materials; and the boatmen who rowed me from Geneva to Versoix could not tell me the name of Mont Blanc!"

And so the rest of that day went drearily by, and I hated Abbeville, and despised the natives, and loathed the hotel *Tête de Bœuf*, and wearied of the waiter, and almost lost my faith in human nature.

—Bradshaw excepted! Bradshaw to whom I trusted for to-morrow morning's deliverance—Bradshaw whom I never doubted for an instant—Bradshaw the inestimable—Brad-

shaw the veracious—Bradshaw the . . . . . Well, I won't mind that just at present!

The resignation with which I dined in the desert, and retired once more to rest beneath the funereal amber satin draperies of the catafalque; the cheerful alacrity with which I rose the next morning; and the benevolent frame of mind in which I discharged my bill, and feed the melancholy waiter, can never be described. At a quarter to ten o'clock I despatched my luggage to the bureau, and at ten precisely I followed it.

It was market-day, and the space in front of the hotel was lined with stalls, and thronged with noisy peasants. Stacks of fruit and vegetables obstructed the pavement; rude barrows and *charrettes* blocked up the roadway; the population of old women seemed to have been multiplied by twenty; and high above all the noise and bustle jangled the perpetual chimes. I crossed the street with difficulty, and in the midst of this confusion

looked round in search of the *cabriolet de poste*. Save the barrows, the *charrettes*, and one yellow dilapidated, weather-beaten, perilous-looking cart, with a penthouse roof and a patched leather apron, standing at the corner of the street, there was no kind of conveyance in sight. I wandered into the stable-yard of the bureau, but found it empty. I peeped into the office, but saw only the canary. I grew nervous. I began to fear that I had mistaken the hour, and that the *courier* had started without me. In this emergency I addressed myself to a sunburnt stripling who was lolling on a bench outside the door with a pipe in his mouth, and a short thong-whip across his knees. He looked about sixteen, was very shabby and ragged, wore *sabots* and no stockings, and had little gold rings in his ears.

"Can you tell me," said I, "if the *cabriolet* has started?"

"Will start as soon as ever the letters

come up from the station," said he, pointing with his pipe to the cart at the corner. "There it stands."

"That rickety old *charrette!*" I exclaimed. "That the government mail! Impossible!"

The boy grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll complain to the authorities," I continued, indignantly. "Eleven francs to ride twelve miles in such a wretched concern as that! Why, it's an imposition; and—and—where can I find the *courier?*"

The boy knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I am the *courier,*" said he, very coolly; "and if you're the passenger for St. Valery, you'd better take your seat; for here come the letters."

As he spoke, the railway omnibus rumbled round the corner. I had no resource but to obey; so I scrambled up as best I could, and found myself condemned to a cushionless bench about six inches in width,

and the society of a very little boy with the hooping cough. In another moment the letter-bag was tossed in—the *gamin courier* seized the reins, uttered a wild whoop, and sprang upon the shafts—the omnibus-driver favoured us with a cut of his whip—the idlers gave a delighted shout—the old market-women scrambled out of the way—and off we rattled at full speed over the stones.

Whoop! Sacr-r-r-r-re! the *gamin* flourishes his whip—the harness-bells jingle—the hotel *Tête de Bœuf* is left far behind—and the grey old mountainous Cathedral is out of sight in no time.

Whoop! Sacr-r-r-r-re! Through the market-place—up one street, down another, and over a dangerous old wooden bridge that groans and creaks beneath our wheels! Now we pass the boundary of the fortifications, and enter upon a dreary, straggling suburb, that seems to get longer the further we go; and now, as we draw near the barrier where

he must pause for the "*visite*," our charioteer subsides into a state of comparative tranquillity, and our speed slackens. The presentation of a paper, the peering in of a mustachioed gendarme, and the perilous introduction of a bayonet close beside my legs, constitutes the "*visite*;" after which we go on at a much slower pace than before.

We are now in the open country, and jogging along a straight sandy road, bordered by poplars and pollards—the very twin brother to the uninviting canal of yesterday. The country round is wide and waste, and the little farmhouses are scattered thinly here and there. Sometimes we pass a wagon with the driver dozing in his place—sometimes a country girl in a cloak and hood, or a weather-beaton old *cantonnier* at work upon the road. The heat becomes almost intolerable, and before we have travelled a couple of miles we are powdered over with a fine white dust that is especially tormenting. Then the little

boy drops off into an uneasy sleep, and has to be propped up with my portmanteau; and the *gamin*, who is taking it very easily just now, and allowing the horse to go at his own pace, dangles his legs lazily to and fro, lights his pipe, pulls out a wellworn and very greasy-looking letter, and begins to read. He continues in this state of quiescence for a mile or more, till the drowsy influences of the scene begin to tell upon myself. Then, just as I also am beginning to nod, he starts into a state of frantic animation, yells, cracks his whip, urges his horse to a shambling gallop, plunges round the corner of the road and through the main street of a village that has hitherto lain unseen behind the hill, and so pulls up before the door of the single *auberge*, with the air of one who has driven hard all the way, and exhausted himself in the service of an ungrateful government.

Thus, at an intermittent pace which is alternately furious or funereal according as we

approach a village or traverse a lonely country road, we journey on our way. By-and-by the landscape grows more and more desolate; the heat more and more oppressive. Dreary sandhills and undulating sweeps of furzy common succeed to the fields and farms about Abbeville. Habitations become fewer and farther between. Vegetation almost ceases. The horse's feet sink deep at every step, and the drifting sand-dust swirls up in our faces with every hot gust of the north-east wind.

We have been four hours and a half upon the road already; it is close upon three o'clock; and a long hill glares before us in the sun.

"From the top yonder," says the *gamin* composedly, "we shall come in sight of the sea."

"The sea! Is St. Valery near the sea?"

"*Mais certainement.* Did not Monsieur know that?"

I did not know it, and I am not pleased to know it. I am not fond of the sea-side. I hate bathing. I am not clever at coast scenery, and I never could draw a boat in my life. Altogether I begin to have misgivings on the subject of what I have come to see; and when we do reach the top of the hill and I catch a glimpse of that glittering line that bounds the horizon like a silver scimitar, I turn away mine eyes in disgust, and feign a sulky sleep.

The feigned sleep merges insensibly into a real one, from which I am by-and-by awakened by more yelling and whooping on the part of the driver, by the headlong jolting of the *cabriolet*, and by the transition from a a soft dusty road to the rough pavement of a town.

It is a street bordered by houses on one side and a quay on the other. The houses are of the poorest, and the population of the shabbiest description. The town consists of

a single irregular street, about a mile in length, and the prevailing trade appears to be in cockles and cordage. At the farther extremity, on a little sandy eminence, stands a small grey-steepled church, surmounted by a forlorn wooden telegraph that has long fallen into disuse, and still points upwards with one lank arm, like a skeleton of ill omen. The river at this point almost ceases to be a river, and widens out between low sandy banks to its junction with the sea. The opposite shore is so far distant that only the ghostly outline of a lighthouse and some trees is visible; and between that shore and St. Valery stretches such a dreary waste of mud, slime, and sand as I have never seen in my life before or since. Imagine the mouth of the Nore with the tide out and all the water gone, save a narrow current which ripples along a groove in the midst of the river-bed, and you will at least have formed some vague notion of the aspect of St. Valery at low water.

Moored beside the quays, or hauled up high and dry on the banks farther down, lie merchant-vessels, barks, and fishing-boats, of various builds and sizes. Some are undergoing repairs; some are being laden, some unladen; and round about them all, in every stage of idleness or activity, swarm scores of rough, weatherbeaten seamen, with big boots, Guernsey shirts, and little gold rings in their brown ears.

Seeing, but scarcely noting these things at the moment, I am jolted along between the ships and the houses, and set down, half awake, before the door of an inn. It is but a mean *auberge*, though the best in the place, and it bears the sign of the *Lion d'Or*. I turn to the waiter, who lolls carelessly against the door, and signify my intention of remaining for the night. But he, instead of responding with that cheerful alacrity which one is accustomed to expect, only shakes his head, and surveys me and my luggage with superb indifference.

"Our rooms," says he, loftily, "are all engaged. Monsieur will probably find accommodation at the *Couronne*."

This is discouraging; but I compromise the matter by arranging to dine at the *Lion d'Or* at six o'clock, even though I have to seek a bed elsewhere. Hereupon the waiter unbends, the *gamin* gets his *pourboire*, the cabriolet clatters away at full speed; and, after a brief rest and hasty lunch, I stroll out to see the town, and beat up my quarters at the *Couronne*.

Alas! the *Couronne* was an *auberge* infinitely smaller, meaner, and dirtier than the *Lion d'Or*, situated close behind the strand, at some distance from the quays. There was a gaunt flagstaff planted in the dreary little garden at the back, and a pile of shells, broken bottles, and vegetable refuse before the door. The public room was full of seafaring men—the landlord himself looked like a retired smuggler—the atmosphere of

the house was suggestive of tar, tobacco, and cognac—and there was a tiny model of a frigate over the fireplace of the tap-room. Altogether *La Couronne* was about the last inn in France which I should voluntarily have chosen for a night's lodging; but there was no help for it.

Here, then, I found myself forced to apply for accommodation. The landlord was too busy with his customers to attend to me, and the landlady referred me to a deaf old *fille de chambre*, as withered and weird as one of Macbeth's witches.

"A bed?" said she, peering and blinking in my face, and holding one hand hollowed over her ear. "Ay, to be sure! Two, if you please—two, if you please!"

"*Merci*, one will be enough. Can I see the room?"

She nodded, stumped upstairs slowly before me, in her heavy *sabots*, and led the way into a large, cold, comfortless chamber, which

contained two beds, and looked as if it had not been occupied for months.

"Have you no other room than this?" I asked, shivering.

"Yes, it is rather chilly," mumbled the *fille de chambre;* "but Monsieur can have a fire in the stove."

"Very well," said I, resignedly; "I shall be in about nine or ten o'clock."

"Three francs a night, and fifty centimes for attendance. Does Monsieur prefer the bed next the door, or the bed next the fire?"

"Either: if I have but the room to myself. Remember, if you please, that I pay for both these beds."

"Good: the bed next the door. Monsieur may rely upon it that everything shall be as comfortable as possible." And the old woman blinked cunningly to herself, in the full persuasion that she had not betrayed her deafness by a single blunder.

More disconsolate than ever, I parted from her with a nod and a trifling gratuity, and made my way out as quickly as I could, turning my face inland, and leaving the town at my back. But landwards or seawards, it was all dreary alike! A boat-building yard; a weir; the mouth of another poplar-bound canal; a few heavy, round-shouldered trading smacks lying up sideways on the slimy shore; a knot of barefooted women washing linen; a rope-walk; another miserable *cabaret*; and a cluster of fishermen's hovels . . . . these were all the sights and incidents that I beheld by the way. I went up to the weir, and sat down upon a line of stone parapet. I looked to the right—land, sand, poplars, a canal, and universal flatness! I looked to the left—strand, sand, mud, houses, boats, and universal flatness! I thought of Abbeville with tender regret; I sighed for the hotel *Tête de Bœuf;* I could have embraced the mouldy waiter! Then—then I turned to

Bradshaw, Bradshaw the betrayer, and upbraided him bitterly.

"Is this," I exclaimed, opening the "Continental Railway Guide," page 185, "is this 'the beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme,' which you, and you alone, O faithless one! have induced me to visit?

> Oh, Bradshaw! I believed thee true,
> And I was blest in so believing;
> But now I mourn . . . ."

I broke off abruptly. My feelings would not allow me to continue; and as it was by this time approaching six o'clock, I rose and went back moodily to dinner.

I have no wish to preserve either a record or a recollection of that dismal meal; but surely that bill of sixteen francs must lie heavily upon the conscience of mine host of the *Lion d'Or!*

A bottle of indifferent Bordeaux; a copy of the *Moniteur* four days old; a couple of cigars; and a pleasant game at billiards in the

public room, with an intelligent young Breton, who told me that he was a commercial traveller, helped to pass away the remainder of the evening, and, for a while, to divert my attention from the subject of my night's lodging. As the hours progressed, however, I could not help thinking of it, and the later it grew the more reluctant I became. The truth was that I had taken an almost childish aversion, not only to my room at the *Couronne*, but to the situation of the inn itself, to its landlord, its frequenters, and its ancient *fille de chambre*. I reasoned with myself in vain; the feeling was strong upon me, and at eleven o'clock, when my new acquaintance bade me good night, and the rest of the guests dispersed, I had more than half a mind to pass the night upon a sofa at the *Lion d'Or*, and have nothing whatever to say to the room which I had already engaged. But I was ashamed to confess my weakness, and so the condescending waiter bowed me out.

The moon had now risen, and the tide was coming in fast. Already the narrow current had expanded into a broad, shining stream; and some of the farthest boats, which in the afternoon had lain sprawling on the mud like stranded whales, were riding buoyantly at anchor. The night was lovely, and I would fain have lingered out for some time longer, but that I feared to find the doors of mine inn closed against me. It was a needless precaution. The night trade of *La Couronne* seemed to be in even a more flourishing state than that of the day; and what with the singing, and laughter, and smoking that was going on in the taproom, I could find no one to attend to me, so quietly possessed myself of a candle and stole up to my room.

The fire had been lighted, and was almost out, and the chamber looked almost as comfortless as ever. My first proceeding was to lock myself in; but the key was rusty and would not turn, and there was no bolt any-

where: my next was to draw the blinds, pile more wood upon the embers, and make myself as comfortable as circumstances would allow. It was a long time before I could overcome my uneasiness sufficiently to go to bed, and even then I only took my boots and cravat off, and lay down in my clothes.

A lonely waterside inn—a gang of riotous revellers—a door that could not be secured! Do what I would, I could not keep from thinking of this; or, if I did succeed for a few moments, it was only to dwell upon something still worse. I recalled all the dreadful tales I had ever read, or heard, of double-bedded rooms, and midnight murders, and unknown bodies drifted out to sea. I recollected one story of a bed that sank through the floor, and another of a bed that smothered its occupant by means of a descending tester. I wondered if anybody had ever died in this one, or if, by the flickering fire-light, I should presently see a pale face staring at me from

between the curtains of the other. In short, I was thoroughly nervous, and had suffered my imagination to run upon ghosts, "deadly murder, spoil, and villany," till at last I was fain to draw the counterpane over my head, and count scores of imaginary sheep till I fell asleep.

I dreamt; but, except that it was painful and confused, I have no recollection of my dream. Neither do I know how long I slept. It may have been but a few minutes, and it may have been an hour; but when I woke, it was with an instantaneous summoning of all my self-possession, and with the consciousness of a human presence in the room. To lie quite motionless, and leave the counterpane still shrouding up my head and face was the result of my first impulse—to listen breathlessly, my second.

A heavy footstep crossing the floor—a candle set down roughly on the table—the drawing up of a chair beside the fire—and a

prolonged yawn, convinced me that the intruder was alone. Presently he threw a fresh log on the fire, and soon after that an odour of coarse tobacco filled the room. At this point, having overcome my first terrors, I felt a strong inclination to make known my presence; but, somehow, I hesitated, and, half in curiosity, half in apprehension, lay still and listened.

Thus a quarter of an hour or more went by, and some revellers from the inn parlour went out, singing, and shouted a noisy farewell to those who remained behind. Then a clock struck on the landing, and my unknown visitor, after shuffling restlessly in his place, got up, and paced to and fro between the window and the door. By-and-by he opened the casement, and leaned out; whereupon I ventured to lift a corner of the quilt; for what with the mildness of the night, the heat of the fire, and the oppressive closeness of my concealment, I was almost smothered. A breath

of cool air, however, and one glimpse of a bulky, broad-shouldered man in a loose pea-coat and woollen cap, was all that I could obtain. Scarcely had he looked out when he exchanged a hurried greeting with some one down below.

"Come up," I heard him say. "Come up. All's safe here!"

With this he closed the window—I cowered down beneath the counterpane—a second heavy footfall came creaking up the stairs, and another man entered the room.

"All right?" asked the first comer, eagerly; and, strange to say, I seemed to have heard his voice before.

"All right," replied the other, depositing some heavy burthen on the floor, and drawing a deep breath of relief. "But I've had to walk more than a mile, *et ça pèse comme le diable!*"

"And you met no one?"

"*Parbleu!* I came face to face with a

sergent de ville just against the landing-place yonder; but I touched my cap, and he said 'Good night,' and I went my way, and he went his. There's nothing to fear, if we can only drop out to sea before daybreak!"

"Yes—but it wants an hour still to high tide, and they've moored her so close in shore that only the high tide will float her! Cursed fools that they were!"

"And we must wait here another hour?"

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* there's no help for it!"

The new comer struck the table heavily with his fist, and muttered a string of oaths, half of which were wholly unintelligible to me. Somehow, his voice, as well as his companion's, struck upon my ear with a familiarity that urged my curiosity to the keenest pitch. If I might only trust to the gloom of this part of the room, and venture on another peep! Just as I was about to dare it, the second stranger spoke again.

"Have you nothing to drink?" said he, moodily.

"Drink!" echoed the other; "I should think so, indeed! why, mate, here's a flask of the real old Schiedam, if that will content you!"

A growl of satisfaction, a deep-drawn breath, and a hearty smack of the lips, was the reply that followed. I could resist no longer. I drew the quilt down gently to the level of my eyes, held my breath, and looked out.

They were both seafaring men, and the second wore much the same kind of dress as the first—a costume which is conventionally adopted by stage-smugglers, but which in actual life is chiefly confined to the seamen of French and Dutch trading smacks, and to our own north-coast fishers. The first comer sat with his back to me; but the other, who was now returning the flask across the table, had his face turned straight towards me. It was

a tawny, sullen countenance, and one that I felt certain I had seen before. When had we met, though? And where? These were difficult questions, and the longer I looked, the more I became puzzled to answer them. It was like a face seen in a dream, but only half remembered—strange, and yet familiar—like and unlike at the same time!

I was not long left in doubt, however; for his companion took the flask, held it to the light to see how much of the liquor was gone; nodded solemnly; said, "Here's to your spiritual glorification, Brother Ambroise!" and drank a deep draught out of the bottle!

This sally evoked a hoarse laugh from both, under cover of which I ventured to shift my position, so as to conceal myself still more effectually, These, then, were my friends the pious pilgrims of the day before yesterday! I recognised them well enough now—Brother Paul was the first, and Brother Ambroise, who had miraculously recovered the sight of his

left eye, was the second. I am bound to confess that this discovery affected me with a very unpleasant sensation all down my back, and caused a rushing noise in my ears that obliterated for some seconds every other sound.

When I next looked up, Paul was bending eagerly forward, and Ambroise was lifting a carpet-bag from the floor to the table.

"If the *sergent de ville* had asked to see what was in this," said he, unbuckling the straps at the mouth of the bag, "I should not have wished him good night quite so civilly!"

"What would you have done?" inquired Paul, with a grim chuckle.

"Brained him," was the brief but significant reply.

I turned cold all over.

The last buckle was now undone. Ambroise plunged in his arm, and brought out a silver cup.

"That's worth having," said Paul, weigh-

ing it in his hand with the air of a connoisseur; "and the Schiedam would taste well out of it—eh, mate?"

"Better out of this," growled the other, producing a superb gold tazza with a jewelled lid. "Diable! how that red stone sparkles at the top!"

He held it at arm's length, admiringly, till his companion lost patience, and snatched it from his hand.

"Go on, can't you!" said he sharply. "What comes next? Where's the gold box? That's the best of the lot, and I put it in myself while you were after the candlesticks. Hah! there it is—there it is! Set it on the table."

My head swam—I could not believe my eyes! Was it—yes, it was indeed the precious shrine of St. Celestine de Cressy, presented in 1630 by Cardinal Richelieu!

I understood it all now—remembered all, even to the manner in which the verger's keys

had been handled by Brother Ambroise. They had robbed the Cathedral!

"Well, what next?"

"Nothing now," said Ambroise gruffly, sweeping the cups back into the bag and packing away the shrine on the top of them. "The tide must be up by this time, and—*Holà!* whose boots are these?"

"Boots!" exclaimed the other, who had gone over to the window. "Boots! What do you mean?"

"Mean!" echoed Ambroise, snatching the candle from the table, and crossing the room at a single bound. "Death of my life! there's a man in the bed!"

As long as I live I shall never forget the horror of that moment. To keep my eyes closed, to regulate the rising and falling of my breath, and to preserve an utterly passive expression of face and attitude, was the result of an instinct beyond myself. My power of thought was for the moment annihilated; and

I feigned sleep as the spider feigns death, almost without knowing how or why I did it.

"He's asleep," said Paul.

"He's acting," said Ambroise, and flashed the candle before my eyes.

Not a nerve quivered. I seemed endued with a supernatural mastery over every fibre of my frame, and never flinched, though the effort was agony.

"It's very well done," said Ambroise, between his teeth; "but it's not real. No man could have slept through the noise we've made."

"Yes, he could, if he'd been drinking," replied Paul. "Don't you see he has gone to bed in his clothes, and isn't that a proof of the state he was in when he came up?"

"Proof or no proof," said Ambroise, with a terrible imprecation, "I'll——"

He broke off abruptly, and I heard a click, like the opening of a clasp-knife.

At this moment I gave myself up for lost,

and a dead cold gathered at my heart. Then Paul interposed again.

"Give me the knife," I heard him say. "I'll test him, and then . . ."

His voice dropped to a whisper; there was a muttered argument; a pause; a moment of maddening suspense! Then the quilt was pulled back, a hot breath ruffled the hair upon my brow, and a keen, cold, deadly edge, fine as the edge of a razor, was drawn slowly across my throat.

The quiver of an eyelid, the flutter of a breath, would have betrayed me; but the love of life was stronger than the fear of death, and, thank God! I lay passive and placid as before.

Paul burst into a loud laugh, and tossed the knife back to its owner.

"*Ivre-mort, pardieu!*" said he. "I'd as soon suspect the walls of listening!"

Ambroise muttered an angry oath, and turned away.

"You're too easy," he said, sullenly. "There's nothing like a dead man's tongue to keep a secret!"

At this moment, a long shrill whistle echoed under the window, like the wail of a Banshee.

"The signal," cried both, in a breath. Ambroise shouldered the bag; the light was blown out; in their eagerness to be gone all else was forgotten; and the next instant I heard their footsteps tramping down the stairs!

* * * * * *

The story of the robbery at Abbeville needs no further repetition from my pen; but to those who are not familiar with the particulars it may be interesting to add that none of the stolen treasure was ever recovered, and neither of the dexterous pilgrims seen or heard of more. The robbery was committed on the evening of their flight, and of my trying adventure at St. Valery. It was supposed

to have been done about nine o'clock. The church was entered from a window overlooking a patch of waste ground beside the canal —a spot of which I still have a sketch in my possession. The keys by which they unlocked the presses were found in the corridor close by; and a locksmith living somewhere in the suburbs of the town testified to having innocently manufactured them from some wax impressions intrusted to him by two holy pilgrims, one of whom was lame, and the other blind of an eye. From the description which I was enabled to give of both these individuals, it was conjectured that they were two brothers of the name of Carpeaux, natives of Hâvre, who had been more than once convicted of petty misdemeanours, and were supposed of late years to be connected with the coast-smuggling of France and Holland. Whether they prospered on their sacrilegious gains, time and chance can alone determine. For my part, I expect that they will come to the

galleys some day, and that we shall then hear more about them.

In the meantime, suffer me, O Reader, to whisper a word of advice at parting. If thou art at home, by all means stay there. It is the safest and happiest place in the world, depend on it. But if, like me, thou hast the Continental mania, then do as I do. Believe in Mr. Murray—never try to find out anything for yourself—and avoid Bradshaw the Betrayer!

CHAPTER VII.

TWO NEW-YEAR'S DAYS.

I AM the organist of St. Martha-cum-Silvermere, a little quiet church, in a little quiet town, some five-and-forty miles north-east of London. It is not a very brilliant appointment—thirty pounds a year, and a small old-fashioned house to live in. But I can exist upon it. I have a few pupils; a gratuity from the Vestry on Christmas-Day and Good Friday; and, above all, a sincere love for my art. Besides, do I not possess a first-class certificate of merit from the Musical Academy of Zollenstrasse, in the Duchy of Zollenstrasse-

am-Main, where I received my professional education? Do I not rejoice in the possession of that famous complimentary letter addressed to me by the wife of the Town-Councillor Von Stumpf? Am I not the proud and fortunate competitor who carried off those two bronze medals, and that faded laurel-wreath, which were awarded at the three grand examinations, and which now adorn the mantelshelf of my little parlour?

The worst part of it is that I have no one to whom I can show these trophies, excepting my little pupils and my child-servant. I am very lonely. How it happens that I possess no friends or kindred in all my native England is of no importance here. My residence abroad, and my foreign education, have something to do with the matter, and . . . . But I will not enter upon that subject. It is painful to look back upon a home and social circle broken up—upon a sunny childhood faded—upon parents lost, but unforgotten:

and, moreover, these things have absolutely nothing to do with my story.

Yes, I am lonely; and, for one still warm of heart, it seems a strange, cold fate enough. Yet my life is not without its pleasures. I like my little church, with its carven tombs, and Gothic crypt, and monumental brasses. I am interested in the aged sexton, and in his long, prosy tales of the De Lacy family, whose tattered banner hangs above the old oak sculpture near the altar-rails. I am attached to the little, rosy-faced rustics of the Sunday-school, who come every Wednesday to the Church, that I may train their sweet infant voices in those chants and psalm-tunes which they sing during the services of the Sabbath. Above all, I love my quaint old organ, up in the dark nook over the church door. I love its triple row of black keys, its obsolete stops, its curiously-carved music desk, and the little gilded angels with trumpets and violoncellos

which are perched so uneasily on the top, and "pipe to the spirit-ditties of no tone."

It is true that the organ is not perfect; nay, I must confess that it is, in many respects, a somewhat eccentric instrument. There is a trumpet-stop in the great organ which always plays a tone and a half too high, and which I have not dared to use for the last two years. The pedals are so worn down by the friction of more than a century, that they are reduced to the thinness of laths, and many of them are dumb. And there is something odd the matter with the bellows, so that the wind comes with a puffy, intermittent sound, as if the organ were asthmatic—a defect which is peculiarly annoying, as it makes the children laugh, and spoils the effect of my most brilliant passages. However, I am a constant little woman in my attachments, and I love the organ dearly for all that.

Silvermere is a very pleasant place in the summer time; and, though I always find plenty to occupy my time and my thoughts, I certainly feel happier then than during any other period of the year. I have my walks in the fields and by the river side; my long practices in the empty church, when the mellow evening sunlight comes streaming through the oriel window, and glinting all along the pillared aisle; my garden to cultivate; and my little vases on the chimney-piece all filled with fresh, sweet flowers. But sometimes I find the winters linger very drearily. Mind, I do not complain. I have my books and my fireside, and many, many comforts, for which I am grateful; yet the long, dark evenings do seem heavy to me at times, and the brightest fire loses half its cheerfulness when one has to sit by it alone. Of all days in the year, New-Year's-day seems the loneliest and dreariest to me. I had been

accustomed, while in Germany, to see this anniversary merrily celebrated, and had borne my share in the gifts, good wishes, balls, and pleasant social festivities with which the Germans usher in the great Birthday and the new-born year. It is no wonder I should now feel sad when all Silvermere is gay; when London friends come down to spend their winter holidays with our townsfolk; when joyous parties are taking place night after night all around me; and I alone receive no loving smiles, no gentle greetings from any human creature.

It seems strange that none of the inhabitants of this town have noticed or befriended me. The Rector is always kind, but his wife is far too haughty to speak to me; and the rest of our little aristocracy, the lawyer's, doctor's, and squire's families, follow her example. With the tradespeople I am, in my turn, too proud to associate; and thus I have neither friend nor acquaintance. I know that

I am not a prepossessing person. I have not the gift of pleasing where I choose. I am silent, and distant, and plain; but oh! I know how full my heart is of love and charity, and how it yearns for something to lean upon and cherish! But there are none who care to read that heart, and none for it to love.

But it was not always thus—there was once . . . .

It was a long time ago. I had been about four years in England, and scarcely two at Silvermere. I was quite young then, and not so plain, and pale, and taciturn as I am now. The organ, too, was not so asthmatic as it is at present.

I saw him first at church. How well I remember it! It was towards the autumn. The weather was gloriously beautiful; and the days were so long and calm that life seemed twice its usual length. The afternoon service was just about to commence—in fact, I

was playing the opening voluntary—when one of the school children stole round softly to my elbow, and whispered:—

"Please, ma'am, there's a strange gentleman in the church!"

A stranger amid a country congregation is an event, and an important one. He attracts more attention than the sermon, and, in the eyes of the children, eclipses the beadle himself.

It was my duty to keep the little urchins in order, so I shook my head gravely, and said, "Hush! don't talk in church," and went on with my voluntary.

"Please, ma'am, he looks like a Frenchman, or—or a Turk!"

This last suggestion was hazarded dubiously, and followed by a peep between the faded curtains that hid me from the congregation. Now a peep between the curtains was a liberty, and an act of insubordination which I never would permit; so I turned round very

sharply, and tried to assume an exceedingly angry countenance.

"Sarah Wilson," I said to the offender, "go back to your place directly, and pay attention to the service. It is of no consequence to you who is, or is not, in the church!"

Sarah Wilson retreated to her seat in disgrace; but I am forced to confess that I was myself guilty of the offence for which I had punished her, for I could not resist peeping through the curtains as soon as the sermon began.

He was sitting in the farther corner of a pew midway between the altar and the door, and leaning back in such a manner that I could see his pale face and his large dark eyes distinctly. His clothes were of a foreign make and style; his hair was long, and fell in careless masses about his face; and it was probably his large moustache that caused the child to take him for a Frenchman "or a

Turk." His face was more intellectual than handsome; and I could not help fancying, as I looked at him, that he must be fond of music.

Somehow, I took especial pains with my concluding voluntary that afternoon, and it was wonderful how long it took me to select one from amongst the piles of music in the corner. First I fixed upon a fugue of Sebastian Bach's; then upon a "Gloria" by Mozart; then upon a movement from the "Mount of Olives." At last I chose the Hallelujah Chorus in the "Messiah" (the most divine piece of music in the world), and played it with all my heart. Indeed, I entered into it with so much enthusiasm and pleasure, that, until I had concluded, and chanced to see him standing there in his place alone in the church, looking up earnestly towards the organ, I had forgotten all about the foreign stranger.

Of course I drew back directly, and busied

myself in putting away the music, and locking the organ doors; and when I looked round again, he was gone.

I saw no more of him, heard no more of him—yet could not keep from thinking of him all the week, and wondering whether he would return on the following Sunday. I fancied that he would—indeed, so certain of it was I, that, when I found him occupying his former place before any one else had entered the church, I felt no surprise at it.

This time, he not only remained listening to my playing after the rest had dispersed, but waited beside the porch till I came out.

"Permit me to thank you, lady, for your beautiful music," he said, courteously. "It is long since I have heard such playing."

I blushed, bowed, and passed on; but his words rung in my ears for days after. I was almost angry with myself for thinking of him

so much; but his look, the tone of his deep voice, the hesitating accent with which he spoke, haunted me strangely. I did not think that he was a foreigner; it seemed to me more as if he had lived much abroad. As for his age, it was perhaps thirty or thirty-five. He might be younger; but the gravity of his manner gave him the appearance of a man in the prime of life.

For two or three more Sundays this continued. He contrived each time to address me, but always with profound respect. I came, by-and-by, almost to live upon these weekly meetings; and, I fear, thought of little else from Sabbath to Sabbath.

I met him one morning by the river side. It was my favourite walk; and, though the autumn was far advanced, it was not yet too cold to stroll, book in hand, through the green meadows and under the alders beside the water's edge.

He spoke to me—he walked beside me—he talked of music, of books, of rural life. He told me he was an author; and spoke of the lands he had visited, and the scenery through which he had passed. I listened in a kind of dream. I had never before heard so eloquent a voice. His every word sank into my heart, and warmed my imagination. He said he would lend me a book which he had written, and would bring it next morning to the meadow in which we had met. I made an effort to refuse it, but he overruled my objections and—I went.

Let me pass over the weeks that followed. Let me not dwell upon the frequency of our after-meetings—the charmed eloquence of his speech—the rapt and humble delight with which I listened and learned. His books were grave and full of thought—far more profound than any I had attempted to read before that time. Yet I strove to comprehend his phi-

losophy, and pored over the pages night after night that I might be able to speak of them with him, and render myself worthier of his friendship.

Ay! his friendship—for he never spoke to me of love. Yet I loved him—loved him timidly, reverently, as a child might have loved! The very touch of his hand when we met and when we parted, made me tremble—the merest glance from his calm eyes seemed to blind and trouble me. Had they once looked upon me in anger, I felt as if I must have fallen at his feet and died.

It was wrong, foolish, childish—what you will; but it was not surprising that I should so worship the first who had been kind and gentle with me. Remember—I was so young, so lonely, so in need of affection and support!

The winter came, and there were many days of rain and snow when I could not venture out; and those were melancholy days for

me—yet sometimes, even then, he would not suffer them to go by without once seeing my face, and would walk patiently up and down the road in front of my little cottage, till I chanced to look from the window.

Then came Christmas time, and he told me that he must go to London for some days to visit his friends. He parted from me very coldly and gravely, as was his wont; but, when he had gone a little distance, came back, and, saying that he should return on New-Year's-day, lifted my hand suddenly to his lips, and turned away.

It was the first token of love that he had shown for me—the very first! Sometimes, it is true, I had fancied I observed a deeper thrill in his voice, a darker fire in his eyes—but it was so fleeting that I had scarcely dared to frame it into words; and, after all, it might have been fancy only. But this kiss! this burning kiss upon my hand! I hastened home; and, entering my little par-

lour, kissed my own hand over and over again where his lips had rested upon it.

I do not now remember any of those days between Christmas-day and the last day of the old year. They glided past me like the pictures of a magic lantern, and I lived as one dreaming. Nothing seemed as it was before. People's faces passing in the street, looked more cheerful; the wintry landscape was beautiful in my eyes; the sound of my own voice, as I used to sit singing softly to myself, appeared to have grown sweeter with my happiness.

Then came the thirty-first of December. To-morrow! ah, to-morrow I should see him again. My heart beat strangely when I thought of that; and I so longed to greet the day and year which would herald in my golden future, that I resolved to sit by my fireside and hear the clocks strike twelve.

It was a very cold and silent night. My

little house stands just on the outskirts of the town, and the far fields beyond the hedge were covered with deep snow. I drew the curtains close, piled a blazing fire, and tried to read. It was useless. I could not fix my thoughts that night. There was a strange, restless, expectant feeling upon me; and as the evening hours went by, I became nervous and agitated.

All at once I felt that he was there, and I trembled. I had heard no sound; I had received no warning of his coming; and yet I knew that he was standing yonder, outside the window.

What awful mysterious sympathy was that which I then experienced, and which occurs to all of us at some time or other during life?

I rose, went over, and drew the curtain. Merciful Heaven! the promptings of my heart were right—he was standing close beside the

lattice, and the moonlight was shining down upon his face!

"Alice!" he said softly. "Alice!"

I opened the window, and leaned out into the cold night.

"I said I would be here on New-Year's-day," he said, and his voice was agitated and broken. "It will be New-Year's-day in a few moments more. I have travelled miles that I might see you. I come to say good-bye!"

I would have spoken; but the words died away upon my lips. I could only clasp my hands silently together.

"I have received news of my brother's illness," he continued; "that brother in Madeira of whom I have told you. I must go to him; but I will write to you by the first ship. I felt I must speak to you again before I left. I could not go without saying how I love you! Hark!" he said, pausing suddenly, and lifting his finger. "They are tolling out the year!"

And the low solemn tones of the bells of St. Martha came moaning through the night.

"The year is almost gone, Alice! Tell me, before it is past, that you love me!"

"I do love you."

The church clock now began to strike.

"I shall be home again before long, Alice. Promise me that you will be my bride before these clocks strike out a year again!"

"I promise."

The clock was still striking.

He grasped the vine with both his hands, and climbed up to the window where I stood.

"Kiss me, Alice—kiss me on the lips before I go! I must be in London by daylight; and the chaise waits for me in the road. One kiss, my life!—one kiss at parting!"

He was hanging to the window by his hands; I laid mine upon them, for he could not remove them to clasp my fingers in his; and then, bending down, I kissed him for the first and only time.

At that instant, the joy-bells rang out their merry chimes like a chorus of laughing voices —his hands slipped away beneath mine—he dropped down upon the snowy path below, and, crying aloud to me, "A happy new year, my darling," ran swiftly along the road, and disappeared.

How long I stood there at the open window listening to the bells, I know not; but when I returned to my seat, the fire had gone out, and the candle was expiring in the socket.

I have but little more to tell; and yet I feel that I would fain write on and on, and still defer the story of my sorrow. But it must be said, and a very few words will suffice to relate it.

The promised letter never came.

The weary, weary months passed by; the spring-time came and went; the golden summer brought its flowers, the autumn its fruits; and yet I never heard from him. Life

grew stale and heavy for me; hope died slowly from my heart; a dull, listless melancholy took possession of my whole soul; and I only wished to die.

Then the winter came again with all its varied aspects, and my only comfort was in wandering where I had wandered a year since with him—in recalling each word that he had uttered—in reading once more each book that I had read with him. Christmas-day passed by. If I had had any hope left, it faded from me when this day was past; "for surely," I thought, "were he still alive, he would have written to me now."

The New-Year's-eve was come again; a foggy, misty night, unlike the last. I was sitting by my fireside with my head buried in my hands, too miserable for tears, when a letter was brought to me—a letter written in an unknown hand; a letter which had been directed and re-directed many times,

and which bore the postage marks of many places. A dread came upon me, for again I felt that here was something concerning him whom I loved. For several moments I dared not open it, and having opened it, it was some time before I dared to read it. This was what it told me :—

"MADAM,—It has devolved upon me to inform you of the painful intelligence of the death of Mr. B——, of ——. He was taken seriously ill during the voyage to Madeira, and expired before we reached the port of Funchal. I enclose a piece of his hair and this ring, which he was in the habit of wearing.

I am, Madam, &c., &c."

You see that my story is but a commonplace one, after all; but perhaps, now that you have heard it, you will not be surprised

when I say that New-Year's-day was the happiest, and is the most sorrowful of my life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PAINTER OF ROTTERDAM.

MY father was a trader and distiller at Schiedam, on the Maas. Without being wealthy, we enjoyed the means of procuring every social comfort. We gave and received visits from a few old friends; we went occasionally to the theatre; and my father had his tulip-garden and summer-house at a little distance from Schiedam, on the banks of the canal which connects the town with the river.

But my father and mother, whose only child I was, cherished one dream of ambition, in

which, fortunately, my own tastes led me to participate: they wanted me to become a painter. "Let me but see a picture by Franz Linden in the gallery at Rotterdam," said my father, "and I shall die happy." So, at fourteen years of age, I was removed from school, and placed in the classes of Messer Kesler, an artist living at Delft. Here I made such progress, that by the time I had reached my nineteenth birthday, I was transferred to the *atelier* of Hans van Roos, a descendant of the celebrated family of that name. Van Roos was not more than thirty-eight or forty years of age, and had already acquired a considerable reputation as a painter of portraits and sacred subjects. There was an altar-piece of his in one of our finest churches; his works had occupied the place of honour for the last six years at the annual exhibition; and for portraiture he numbered among his patrons most of the wealthy merchants and burgomasters of the city. In-

deed, there could be no question that my master was rapidly acquiring a fortune commensurate with his popularity.

Still he was not a cheerful man. It was whispered by the pupils that he had met with a disappointment early in life—that he had loved, been accepted, and, on the eve of marriage, was rejected by the lady for a more wealthy suitor. He came from Friesland, in the north of Holland, when a very young man. He had always been the same gloomy, pallid, labour-loving citizen. He was a rigid Calvinist. He was sparing of domestic expenditure, and liberal to the poor:—this every one could tell you, and no one knew more.

The number of his pupils was limited to six. He kept us constantly at work, and scarcely permitted us to exchange a word with each other during the day. Standing there among us so silently, with the light from above pouring down upon his pallid face,

and, becoming absorbed in the sombre folds of his long black dressing-gown, he looked almost like some stern old portrait himself. To tell the truth, we were all somewhat afraid of him. Not that he assumed any undue authority: on the contrary, he was stately, silent, and frigidly polite; but his politeness had in it something oppressive, and we were all happier out of his presence. None of us resided under his roof. I had a second floor in a neighbouring street, and two of my fellow-students occupied rooms in the same house. We used to meet at night in each other's chambers, and make excursions to the exhibitions and theatres; and sometimes, on a summer's evening, we would hire a pleasure-boat, and row for a mile or two down the river. We were merry enough then, and not quite so silent, I promise you, as in the gloomy studio of Hans van Roos.

In the meantime, I was anxious to glean every benefit from my master's in-

structions. I improved rapidly, and my paintings soon excelled those of the other five. My taste did not incline to sacred subjects, like that of Van Roos; but rather to the familiar rural style of Berghem and Paul Potter. It was my great delight to wander along the rich pasture-lands; to watch the amber sunset; the herds going home to the dairy; the lazy wind-mills; and the calm clear waters of the canals, scarcely ruffled by the passage of the public *treckschuyt.** In depicting scenes of this nature—

> The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale,
> The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail—

I was singularly fortunate. My master never praised me by word or look; but when my father came up one day from Schiedam to visit me, he drew him aside and told him, in a voice inaudible to the rest, that "Messer Franz would do credit to the profession;" which so delighted the good distiller, that he

* Canal boat.

straightway took me out with him for the day, and, having given me fifteen gold pieces as a testimony of his satisfaction, took me to dine with his friend the burgomaster, Von Gael. It was an eventful visit for me. On that evening I first fell in love.

Few people, I think, would at that time have denied the personal attractions of Gertrude von Gael; yet I do not know that it was so much her features as her soft voice and gentle womanly grace that fascinated me. Though so young, she performed the honours of her father's princely table with self-possession and good-breeding. In the evening she sang some sweet German songs to her own simple accompaniment. We talked of books and of poetry. I found her well read in English, French, and German literature. We spoke of art; and she discovered both judgment and enthusiasm.

As we took our leave at night, the burgomaster shook me warmly by the hand, and

told me to come often. I fancied that Gertrude's blue eyes brightened when he said it and I felt the colour rush quickly to my brow as I bowed and thanked him.

"Franz," said my father, when we were once more in the street, "how old are you?"

"Just twenty-two, sir," I replied, rather surprised at the question.

"You will not be dependent on your brush, my boy," continued my father, as he leaned upon my arm and looked back at the lofty mansion we had just left. "I have been neither wasteful nor unsuccessful; and it will be my pride to leave you a respectable income at my death."

I inclined my head in silence, and wondered what would come next.

"Burgomeister von Gael is one of my oldest friends," said my father.

"I have often heard you speak of him, sir," I replied.

"And he is rich."

"So I should suppose."

"Gertrude will have a fine fortune," said my father, as if thinking aloud.

I bowed again, but this time rather nervously.

"Marry her, Franz."

I dropped his arm, and started back.

"Sir!" I faltered, "I—I—marry the Fraulein von Gael!"

"And pray, sir, why not?" said my father curtly, stopping short in his walk, and leaning both hands upon the top of his walking-stick.

I made no reply.

"Why not, sir?" repeated my father very energetically. "What could you wish for better? The young lady is handsome, good-tempered, educated, rich. Now, Franz, if I thought you had been such a fool as to form any other attachment without . . ."

"Oh, sir, you do me injustice!" I cried. "Indeed, I have done nothing of the kind.

But do you think that—that she would have me?"

"Try her, Franz," said my father good-humouredly, as he resumed my arm. "If I am not very much mistaken, the burgomeister would be as well pleased as myself; and as for the fraulein—women are easily won."

We had by this time reached the door of the inn where my father was to sleep for the night. As he left me, his last words were:—

"Try her, Franz—try her."

From this time I became a frequent visitor at the house of the Burgomeister von Gael. It was a large old-fashioned mansion, built of red brick, and situated upon the famous line of houses known as the Boompjes. In front lay the broad river, crowded with merchant vessels, from whose masts fluttered the flags of all the trading nations of the world. Tall trees, thick with foliage, lined the quays,

and the sunlight flickered through their leaves upon the spacious drawing-rooms of Gertrude's home.

Here, night after night, when the studies of the day were over, I used to sit with her beside the open window, watching the busy crowd beneath, the rippling river, and the rising moon that tipped the masts and city spires with silver. Here we read together from the pages of our favourite poets, and counted the first pale stars that trembled into light.

It was a happy time. But there came at last a time still happier, when, one still evening as we sat alone, conversing in unfrequent whispers, and listening to the beating of each other's hearts, I told Gertrude that I loved her; and she, in answer, laid her fair head upon my shoulder with a sweet confidence, as if content so to rest for ever. Just as my father had predicted, the burgomaster

readily sanctioned our betrothal, specifying but one condition, and this was that our marriage should not take place till I had attained my twenty-fifth year. It was a long time to wait; but I should by that time, perhaps, have made a name in my profession. I intended soon to send a picture to the annual exhibition—and who could tell what I might not do in three years to show Gertrude how dearly I loved her!

And so our happy youth rolled on, and the quaint old dial in Messer von Gael's tulip-garden told the passage of our golden hours. In the meantime, I worked sedulously at my picture. I laboured upon it all the winter; and when spring-time came, I sent it in, with no small anxiety as to its probable position upon the walls of the gallery. It was a view in one of the streets of Rotterdam. There were the high old houses with their gables and carven doorways, and the red sunset glittering on the panes of the upper windows—

the canal flowing down the centre of the street —the white drawbridge, with a barge just passing underneath—the green trees deep in shadow, and the spire of the Church of St. Lawrence rising beyond, against the clear warm sky. When it was quite finished and about to be sent away, even Hans van Roos nodded a cold encouragement, and said that it deserved a good position. He had himself prepared a painting this year, on a more ambitious scale and a larger canvas than usual. It was a sacred subject, and represented the Conversion of St. Paul. His pupils admired it warmly, and none more than myself. We all pronounced it to be his masterpiece, and the artist was evidently of our opinion.

The day of exhibition came at last. I had scarcely slept the previous night; and the early morning found me, with a number of other students, waiting impatiently before the yet unopened door. When I arrived, it wanted an hour to the time, but half the day

seemed to elapse before we heard the heavy bolts give way inside, and then forced our way through the narrow barriers. I had flown up the staircase, and found myself in the first room, before I remembered that I should have purchased a catalogue at the door. I had not patience, however, to go back for it; so I strode round and round the room, looking eagerly for my picture. It was nowhere to be seen; and I passed on to the next. Here my search was equally unsuccessful.

"It must be in the third room," I said to myself, "where all the best works are placed! Well, if it be hung ever so high, or in ever so dark a corner, it is, at all events, an honour to have one's picture in the third room!"

But, though I spoke so bravely, it was with a sinking heart I ventured in. I could not really hope for a good place among the magnates of the art; while in either of the other rooms there had been a possibility that my

picture might receive a tolerable position.

The house had formerly been the mansion of a merchant of enormous wealth, who had left it, with his valuable collection of paintings, to the State. The third room had been his reception-chamber, and the space over the magnificently carved chimney was assigned, as the place of honour, to the best painting. The painter of this picture always received a costly prize, for which he was likewise indebted to the munificence of the founder. To this spot, my eyes were naturally turned as I entered the door. Was I dreaming? I stood still—I turned hot and cold by turns—I ran forward. It was no illusion! There was my picture, my own picture, in its little modest frame, installed in the chief place of the gallery! And there, too, was the official card stuck in the corner, with the words "PRIZE PAINTING," printed upon it in shining gold letters. I ran down the staircase and bought a catalogue,

that my eyes might be gladdened by the confirmation of this joy; and there, sure enough, was printed at the very commencement: "ANNUAL PRIZE PAINTING—*View in Rotterdam*, No 127—FRANZ LINDEN." I could have wept for delight. I was never tired of looking at my picture. I walked from one side to the other — I retreated— I advanced closer to it—I looked at it in every possible light, and forgot all but my happiness.

"A very charming little painting, sir," said a voice at my elbow.

It was an elderly gentleman, with gold spectacles and an umbrella. I coloured up, and said falteringly—

"Do you think so?"

"I do, sir," said the old gentleman. "I am an amateur—I am very fond of pictures. I presume that you are also an admirer of art?"

I bowed.

"Very nice little painting, indeed; ve–ry

nice," he continued, as he wiped his glasses, and adjusted them with the air of a connoisseur. "Water very liquid, colours pure, sky transparent, perspective admirable. I'll buy it."

"Will you?" I exclaimed, joyfully. "Oh! thank you, sir!"

"Oh," said the old gentleman, turning suddenly upon me and smiling kindly, "so you are the artist, are you? Happy to make your acquaintance, Messer Linden. You are a very young man to paint such a picture as that. I congratulate you sir; and—I'll buy it."

So we exchanged cards, shook hands, and became the best friends in the world. I was burning with impatience to see Gertrude, and tell her all my good fortune; but my new patron took my arm, and said that he must make the tour of the rooms in my company; so I was forced to comply.

We stopped before a large painting that

occupied the next best situation to mine: it was my master's work, the Conversion of St. Paul. While I was telling him of my studies in the atelier of the painter, a man started from before us, and glided away; but not before I had recognised the pale countenance of Van Roos. There was something in the expression of his face that shocked me, something that stopped my breath, and made me shudder. What was it? I scarcely knew; but the glare of his dark eyes and the quivering passion of his lip haunted me for the rest of the day, and came back again in my dreams. I said nothing of it to Gertrude that afternoon, but it had effectually sobered my exultation. I dreaded, next day, to return to the studio; but, to my surprise, my master received me as he never had received me before. He advanced, and extended his hand to me.

"Welcome, Franz Linden," he said, smiling; "I am proud to call you my pupil."

The hand was cold—the voice was harsh—the smile was passionless. My companions crowded round, and congratulated me; and in the warm tones of their young, cheerful voices, and the close pressure of their friendly hands, I forgot all that had troubled me in the manner of Van Roos.

Not long after this event, Gertrude's father desired to have her portrait painted—to console him for her absence, he said, when I should be so wicked as to take her away from him. I recommended my old master, whose tutelage I had recently left; and Van Roos was summoned to fulfil a task that I would gladly have performed, had it been in my power to do so. But portraiture was not my line. I could paint a sleek, spotted milch cow, or a drove of sheep, far better than the fair skin and golden curls of my darling Gertrude.

She could not endure the artist from the first. In vain I reasoned with her—all

was of no use; and she used to say, at the end of every such conversation, that she wished the portrait were finished, and that she could no more help disliking him than—than she could help loving me. So our arguments always ended with a kiss.

But this portrait took a long time. Van Roos was in general a rapid painter; yet Gertrude's likeness progressed at a very slow pace, and, like Penelope's web, seemed never to be completed. One morning I happened to be in the room—a rare event at that time, for I was hard at work upon my new landscape; and I was struck by the change that had come over my late master. He was no longer the same man. There was a light in his eye, and a vibration in his voice, that I had never observed before; and when he rose to take leave, there was a studied courtesy in his bow and manner that took me quite by surprise.

Still, I never suspected the truth, and still

the portrait was as far as ever from being finished.

It all came out at last; and one morning Hans van Roos made a formal offer of his hand and heart. Of course, he was refused.

"But as kindly as was possible, dear Franz," she said, when she told me in the evening; "because he is your friend, and because he seemed to feel it so deeply. And —and you don't know how dreadfully white he turned, and how he tried to restrain his tears. I pitied him, Franz—indeed, I was very sorry!"

And the gentle creature could scarcely keep from weeping herself as she told me.

I did not see Van Roos for some months after this disclosure. At last I met him accidentally in front of the stadthouse, and, to my surprise, for the second time in his life, he held out his hand.

"A good day to you, Messer Linden," said

he. "I hear that you are on the high road to fame and fortune."

"I have been very prosperous, Messer van Roos," I replied, taking the proffered hand. "But I never forget that I owe my present proficiency to the hours spent in your atelier.'

A peculiar expression flitted over his face.

"If I thought that," said he, hastily, "I . . . I should esteem myself particularly happy."

There was so odd a difference in the way in which he uttered the beginning and end of this sentence—so much hurry and passion in the first half, such deliberate politeness in the last, that I started and looked him full in the face. He was as smiling and impenetrable as a marble statue.

"I, too, have been fortunate," he said, after a moment's pause. "Have you seen the new church lately built near the east end of the Haring-vliet?"

I replied that I had observed it in passing, but had not been inside.

"I have been entrusted," he said, "with the superintendence of the interior decorations. My 'Conversion of St. Paul' is purchased for the altar-piece, and I am now engaged in painting a series of frescoes upon the ceiling. Will you come in one day, and give me your opinion upon them?"

I professed myself much flattered, and appointed to visit him in the church on the following morning. He was waiting for me at the door when I arrived, with the heavy keys in his hand. We passed in, and he turned the key in the lock.

"I always secure myself against intruders," he said, smiling. "People will come into the church if I leave the doors unfastened; and I do not choose to carry on my art, like a sign-painter, in the presence of every blockhead who chooses to stand and stare at me."

It was surprising in what a disagreeable

manner this man shewed his teeth when he smiled.

The church was a handsome building, in that Italian style which imitates the antique, and prefers grace and magnificence to the dignified sanctity of the Gothic order. A row of elegant Corinthian columns supported the roof at each side of the nave; gilding and decorative cornices were lavished in every direction; the gorgeous altar-piece already occupied its appointed station; and a little to the left of the railed space where the communion-table was to be placed, a lofty scaffolding was erected, that seemed, from where I stood, almost to come in contact with the roof, and above which I observed the yet unfinished sketch of a masterly fresco. Three or four more, already completed, were stationed at regular intervals, and some others were merely outlined in charcoal upon their intended site.

"Will you not come up with me?" asked

the painter, when I had expressed my admiration sufficiently; 'or are you afraid of turning giddy?"

I felt somewhat disinclined to impose this trial on my nerves, but still more disinclined to confess it; so I followed him up from flight to flight of the frail structure, without once daring to look down.

At last we reached the summit. As I had supposed, there was not even room enough for the artist to assume a sitting posture, and he had to paint while lying on his back. I had no fancy to extend myself on this lofty couch; so I only lifted my head above the level of his flooring, looked at the fresco, and descended immediately to the flight below, where I waited till he rejoined me.

"How dangerous it must be," said I, shuddering, "to let yourself down from that abominable perch!"

"I used to think so at first," he replied, "but I am now quite accustomed to it.

Fancy," said he, approaching close to the edge of the scaffolding—"fancy falling from here into the church below!"

"Horrible!" cried I.

"I wonder how high it is from the level of the pavement," continued Van Roos musingly; "a hundred and eighty feet, I daresay—perhaps two hundred."

I drew back, giddy at the thought.

"No man could survive such a fall," said the painter, still looking over. "The thickest skull would be dashed to atoms on the marble down there."

"Pray, come away," said I, hastily. "My head swims at the very idea."

"Does it?" said he, turning suddenly upon me with the voice and eye of a fiend—"does it? Fool!" he cried as he seized me round the body in his iron clasp—"fool, to trust yourself here with me—me whom you have wronged, whose life you have blasted!—me whom you have crossed in fame and in love!

Down, wretch, down! I've vowed to have your blood, and my time has come!"

It sickens me even now to recall that desperate struggle. At the first word, I had sprung back and seized a beam above my head. He strove to tear me from it. He foamed at the mouth; the veins rose like knots upon his forehead; and still—though I felt my wrists strained and my fingers cruelly lacerated—still I held on with the terrible energy of one who struggles for dear life. It lasted a long time—at least it seemed long to me—and the scaffolding rocked beneath our feet. At length I saw his strength failing. Suddenly I loosed my hold, and threw my whole weight upon him. He staggered—he shrieked—he fell!

I dropped upon my face in mute horror. An age of silence seemed to elapse, and the cold dews stood upon my brow. Presently I heard a dull sound far below. I crawled to the brink of the scaffolding, and looked over

—a shapeless mass was lying on the marble pavement, and all around it was red with blood.

I think an hour must have elapsed before I could summon courage to descend. When, at length, I reached the level ground, I turned my face from what was so near my feet, and tottered to the door. With trembling hands and misty eyes, I unlocked it, and rushed into the street.

It was many months before I recovered from the brain fever brought on by that terrible day. My ravings, I have been told, were fearful; and had any doubt existed in the minds of men as to which of us two had been the guilty one, those ravings were alone sufficient to establish my innocence. A man in a delirious fever is pretty sure to speak the truth. By the time I was able to leave my chamber, Gertrude also had grown pale and spiritless, and all unlike her former

self. Rotterdam was insupportable to me. I found myself a hero of romance; a lion; a thing to be stared after wherever I went—all of which only served to shatter my nerves still more. In short, change of air and scene was recommended for us both; so we thought we could not do better than marry, and take our wedding tour for the sake of our healths. And I assure you, reader, it did us both a great deal of good.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE AND MONEY.

EMS is a charming place. It lies about twelve miles to the south-east of Coblentz, in the valley of the Lahn,—that miniature Rhine, all bordered with orchards and vine-yards, and steep wooded hills. The town consists of one irregular line of hotels and lodging-houses, with the mountains at the back, the river in front, and long double rows of acacias and lindens planted at each side of the carriage-way. Swarms of donkeys with gay saddles, attended by drivers in blue

blouses and scarlet-trimmed caps, loiter beneath the trees, soliciting hire. The Duke of Nassau's band plays alternate selections from German, Italian, and French music in the public garden. Fashionable invalids are promenading. Gaming is going forward busily in the Conversation-Haus alike daily and nightly. Ladies are reading novels and eating ices within hearing of the band; or go by, with coloured-glass tumblers in their hands, towards the Kurhaus, where the hot springs came bubbling up from their nauseous sources down in the low vaulted galleries filled with bazaar-like shops, loungers, touters, and health-seekers. All is pleasure, indolence, and flirtation.

To Ems, therefore, came the Herr Graff von Steinberg—or, as we should say, the Count von Steinberg—to drink the waters, and while away a few weeks of the summer season. He was a tall, fair, handsome young man; an excellent specimen of

the German dragoon. You would never have supposed, to look at him, that illness could have brought him to Ems; and yet he suffered from two very serious maladies, both of which, it was to be feared, were incurable by any springs, medicinal or otherwise. In a word he was hopelessly in love, and desperately poor The case was this:—His grandfather had left a large property, which his father, an irreclaimable gamester, had spent to the uttermost farthing. The youth had been placed in the army, through the interest of a friend. His father was now dead; the inheritance for ever gone; and he had absolutely nothing beyond his pay as a captain of dragoons, and the distant prospect of one day retiring with the title and half-pay of major. A sorry future for one who was disinterestedly and deeply in love with one of the richest heiresses in Germany!

"Who marries my daughter will receive

with her a dowry of 200,000 florins, and I shall expect her husband to possess, at the least, an equal fortune."

So said the Baron von Hohendorf, in cold reply to the lover's timid declaration; and with these words still sounding in his ears, weighing on his spirits, and lying by day and night heavily upon his heart, came the Count von Steinberg to seek forgetfulness, or, at least, temporary amusement, at the Brunnen of Ems. But in vain. Pale and silent, he roamed restlessly to and fro upon the public promenades, or wandered away to hide his wretchedness in the forests and valleys round about. Sometimes he would mingle with the gay crowd in the Kurhaus, and taste the bitter waters; sometimes linger mournfully round the tables of the gaming company, gazing enviously, yet with a kind of virtuous horror, at the glittering heaps of gold, and the packets of crisp yellow notes which there changed hands so

swiftly and in such profusion. But Albert von Steinberg was no gambler. He had seen and experienced the evil of that terrible vice too keenly already in his own father, to fall a prey to it himself. Years ago, he had vowed never to play; and kept his oath. Even now, when he found himself, as it might happen now and then, looking on with some little interest at the gains and losses of others, he would shudder, turn suddenly away, and not return again for days. Nothing could be more regular than his mode of life. In the morning he took the waters; at noon he walked, or read, or wrote; in the evening he strolled out again and heard the band, and by the time that all the society of the place was assembled in the ball-room or at the tables, he had returned to his quiet lodgings, and, perhaps, already gone to bed, in order that he might rise early the next morning to study some scientific work, or take a pedestrian excursion to the ruins

of some old castle within the limits of a long walk.

It was a dull life for a young man—especially with that sweet, sad recollection of Emma von Hohendorf pervading every thought of the day. And all because he was poor! Was poverty a crime, he asked himself, that he should be punished for it thus? He had a great mind to throw himself off the rock where he was standing—or to precipitate himself into the river, if it were deep enough—or to go to the baron's own castle-gate, and shoot himself—or—or, in short, to do anything desperate, if it were only sufficiently romantic; for his hot young German head, full of sentiment and Schiller, would be content with nothing less than an imposing tragedy.

He thought all this, sitting in a little fantastic summer-house perched high up on a ledge of steep rock just in front of the gardens and public buildings. He looked

down at the gay company far beneath, and he heard the faint music of the royal band. The sun was just setting—the landscape was lovely—life was still sweet, and he thought that he would not commit suicide that evening, at all events. So he went moodily down the winding pathway, across the bridge, and, quite by chance, wandered once more into the Conversation Haus. The gaming was going on, the glittering gold pieces were changing hands, the earnest players sitting round as usual. The sight only made him more unhappy.

"Two hundred thousand florins!" he thought to himself. "Two hundred thousand florins would make me the happiest man on earth, and I cannot get them. These men win and lose two hundred thousand florins ten times over in a week, and think nothing of the good, the happiness, the wealth that sum would be to numbers of their fellow-creatures. What a miserable dog I am!"

And he pulled his hat on fiercely, folded

his arms, and strode out of the rooms, taking the road to his own lodging with so dismal an air that the people in the streets turned and looked after him, saying, "He has lost money —we saw him come out of the gaming-rooms."

"Lost money!" muttered he to himself, as he went into his garret and locked the door. "Lost money, indeed! I wish I had any to lose."

And poor Albert von Steinberg fell asleep, lamenting that the age of fairies and gnomes had passed away.

His sleep was long, sound, dreamless—for young men, in spite of love and poverty, sleep pleasantly. He woke somewhat later than he had intended, rubbed his eyes, yawned, looked hazily at his watch, lay down again, once more opened his eyes, and at last sprang valiantly out of bed.

Is he still dreaming? Is it an hallucination? Can he be mad? No, it is real,

true, wonderful! There upon the table lies a brilliant heap of golden pieces—hard, ringing, real golden pieces, and he turns them over, weighs them in his hands, lets them drop through his fingers to test the evidence of his senses.

How did they come there? That is the important question. He rings the bell violently, once—twice—thrice. The servant runs up, thinking some dreadful accident has occurred.

"Some one has been here to call upon me this morning?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Indeed! Somebody, then, has been upstairs since I have been asleep."

"No, Monsieur."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Monsieur."

"Now speak the truth, Bertha; some one has been here. You are paid to deny it. Only tell me who it was, and I will give you double for your information."

The servant looked both alarmed and astonished.

"Indeed there has not been a soul. Does monsieur miss anything from his apartment? Shall I send for the gendarmes?"

The count looked searchingly in the girl's face. She seemed wholly sincere and truthful. He tried every means yet left—adroit questions, insinuations, bribes, sudden accusations; but in vain. She had seen no one—heard no one. The door of the house was closed, and had not been left open. No one—absolutely no one—had been there.

Puzzled, troubled, bewildered, our young friend dismissed her, believing, in spite of his surprise, the truth of what she stated. He then locked the door and counted the money.

Ten thousand florins! not a groschen more or less!

Well, it was there; but whence it came remained a mystery.

"All mysteries clear themselves up in

time," said he, as he locked the money up in his bureau. "I daresay I shall find it all out by-and-by. In the meantime I will not touch a single florin of it."

He tried not to think of it, but it was so strange a thing that he could not prevent it running in his head. It even kept him awake at night, and took away his appetite by day. At last he began to forget it; at all events, he became used to it, and at the end of a week it had ceased to trouble him.

About eight days from the date of this occurrence he woke, as before, thinking of Emma, and not at all of the money, when, on looking round, lo! there it was again. The table was once more covered with glittering gold!

His first impulse was to run to the bureau in which the first ten thousand florins were stored away. Surely he must have taken them out the night before, and forgotten to replace them. No, there they lay in the drawer

where he had hidden them, and there upon the table was a second supply, larger, if anything, than the first!

Pale and trembling, he turned them over. This time there were some notes—Prussian and French—mingled with the gold. In all, twelve thousand florins.

He had locked his door—could it be opened from without by a skeleton key? He had a bolt fixed within, that very day. Honest Albert von Steinberg! he took as much pains against fortune as others do against robbery!

Two days later, however, his invisible benefactor came again; and this time he found himself fourteen thousand florins the richer. It was an inexplicable prodigy! No one could have entered by the bolted door, or from the window; for he lived in a garret on the fourth story—or by the chimney, for the room was heated by a stove, the funnel of which was no thicker than his arm? Was it a plot to

ruin him? or was he tempted by the powers of evil? He had a great mind to apply to the police, or to a priest (for he was a good Catholic),—still he thought he would wait a little longer. After all, there might be more unpleasant visitations!

He went out, greatly agitated, and walked about the entire day, pondering this strange problem. Then he resolved, if ever it recurred, to state his case to the *chef de police*, and to set a watch upon the house by night.

Full of this determination, he came home and went to bed. In the morning, when he woke, he found that Fortune had again visited him. The first wonder of the thing had now worn off; so he rose, dressed himself, and sat down leisurely to count the money over, before lodging his declaration at the *bureau de police*. While he was engaged in making up little rouleaux of gold, twenty in each rouleau, there came a sudden knocking at his door.

He had no friends in Ems. He started like a guilty man, and threw an overcoat hastily upon the table, so as to conceal the gold. Could it be that this summons had anything to do with the money? Was he suspected of something that——. The knock was repeated, this time more imperatively. He opened the door. It was the Baron von Hohendorf!

"How! The Baron von Hohendorf in Ems! I am rejoiced—this honour—I—pray be seated."

The poor young dragoon's heart beat so fast, and he trembled so with pleasure, hope, and astonishment, that he could scarcely speak.

The baron looked at him steadily, but sternly; thrust back the proffered chair; and took no notice of the extended hand.

"Yes, Herr Count," he said drily. "I arrived yesterday in this place. You did not expect to see me."

"Indeed, no. It is a pleasure—a—delight —a . . . ."

He was so agitated that he forgot his visitor was standing, and sat down; but rose again directly.

"And yet I saw you, Herr Count, yesterday evening, as you came out of the Conversation-rooms."

"Me? Indeed, sir, I never visited the Conversation-rooms at all yesterday; but I am very sorry that I was not there, since I should have had the honour of meeting you."

"Pardon me, Herr Count, I saw you. It is useless to argue the point with me, for I stood close behind your chair for the greater part of an hour. Do you know why I am here this morning in your apartment?"

The young man blushed, faltered, turned pale. He knew but one reason that could have brought a visit from the baron. Had he relented? Could it be his generous design to make two lovers' hearts happy by

granting that consent which he formerly refused? There were things more impossible. The baron was capable of such goodness! Something to this effect he stammered in broken sentences, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hands playing nervously with a pen.

The baron drew himself to his full height. If he had looked stern before, he looked furious now. For a few moments he could hardly speak for rage. At last his wrath broke forth.

"Impertinence such as this, Herr Count, I did not expect! I came here, sir, to give some words of advice to your father's son—to warn—to interpose, if possible, between you and your destruction. I did not come to be insulted!"

"Insulted, baron?" repeated the young man, somewhat haughtily. "I have said nothing to call for such a phrase at your lips, unless, indeed, my poverty insults you. The

richest man in this land could do no more than love your daughter, and were she a queen, the homage of the poorest would not disgrace her."

"Permit me to ask you one question. What brings you to Ems?"

The young man hesitated, and the baron smiled ironically.

"I came, sir," he said at length, "in search of—I will confess it—in search of peace, of forgetfulness, of consolation."

His voice broke: he looked down, and remained silent.

The baron laughed aloud—a harsh mocking laugh that caused Albert to raise his head with a movement of sudden indignation.

"I have not deserved this treatment at your hands, Baron Hohendorf," he said, turning towards the window.

"A gambler deserves only the contempt of honourable men," replied the baron.

"A gambler!" repeated Albert. "Good

heavens, sir! I have never touched a card in my life."

"What effrontery! You forget, then, that it is in my power to confront you with the proof of your vice; nay, at this instant to confound and convict you. What gold is this?"

And the old gentleman, whose eyes had already detected the glimmer of the coin beneath the coat, lifted the garment away upon the end of his walking-stick. The lover turned pale, and could not speak.

"*Der Teufel!* For a poor man you have, it seems, a well-filled travelling purse! Ah! *you* never play!"

"Never, sir."

"Indeed! Pray, then, if your gold be not the fruit of the gaming-table, whence comes it?"

"I know not. You will not believe me, I am aware; but I swear that I speak the truth. This gold comes here, I know not how. This

is the fourth time I have found it upon my table. I know not why it is here, who brings it, or how it is brought. By my honour as a gentleman and a soldier—by all my hopes of happiness in this life or the next, I am utterly ignorant of everything about it!"

"This is too much!" cried the baron, furiously. "Do you take me for an idiot or a dotard? Good morning to you, sir, and I hope I may never see your face again!"

He slammed the door violently behind him, and went away down the stairs, leaving poor Von Steinberg utterly overwhelmed and broken-hearted.

"Cursed gold!" he exclaimed, dashing it upon the floor in his anger, "what brought thee here, and why dost thou torment me!"

Then the poor fellow thought of Emma, and of how his last chance was wrecked; and he was so miserable, that he threw himself upon his bed, and wept bitterly. All at once he remembered that the baron had a

sister at Langenschwalbach; she, perhaps, would believe him, would intercede for him! He started up, resolved to go thither at once; hastily gathered together the scattered pieces of money; locked them up in the drawer with the rest; ran down to a neighbouring carriage-stand; hired a vehicle to convey him to the railway-station, and in less than half an hour was on his way. In about three hours he arrived. He passed nearly the whole day in trying to discover the lady's address, and, when he had found it, was told that she had been for the last two months at Vienna. It was a foolish journey, with disappointment at the end of it! He came back quite late in the evening to Ems, and entered his own room, utterly broken down by anxiety and fatigue.

In the meantime the baron, crimson with rage, had returned to his hotel, and told all the circumstances to his daughter. She would not believe in the guilt of her lover.

"He a gambler!" she exclaimed. "It is impossible!"

"But I saw the gold upon his table!"

"He says he knows nothing of it, and he never told an untruth in his life. It will all be explained by-and-by."

"But I saw him playing at the tables!"

"It was some other who resembled him."

"Will you believe it, if you see him yourself?"

"I will, my father, and I will renounce him for ever. But not till then."

"Then you shall be convinced this evening."

The evening came, and the rooms were more than usually crowded. There was a ball in the *salon de danse*; supper in the ante-room; gaming, as usual, in the third apartment. The Baron von Hohendorf was there with his daughter and some friends. They made their way to the tables, but he whom they sought was not there. Eager

faces enough were there around the board—faces of old women, cunning and avaricious; faces of pale dissipated boys, scarce old enough, one would have thought, to care for any games save those of the school-ground; faces of hardened, cool, determined gamblers; faces of girls young and beautiful, and of men old and feeble. Strange table, around which youth and beauty, age, deformity, and vice, meet on equal ground!

Suddenly there was a movement at the farther end of the room; a whisper went round; the spectators made way, and the players drew aside for one who now approached and took his place amongst them. This deference is shown only to those who play high and play frequently. Who is this noted gambler? Albert von Steinberg.

A cry of agony breaks from the pale lips of a young girl at the other end of the room. Alas! it is too surely he! He neither hears nor heeds anything around him. He does not

even look towards her. He seats himself very quietly, as a matter of course; takes some *rouleaux* of gold and a packet of notes from his pocket; stakes a large sum; and begins to play with all the cool audacity of one whose faith in his own luck is unshakeable, and who is perfect master of the game. Besides this, he carried his self-command to that point which is only attained by years of practice. It was splendid to see him so impassive. His features were fixed and inexpressive as those of a statue; the steady earnestness of his gaze had something terrible in it; his very movements were scarcely those of a man liable to human frailties and human emotions; and the right hand with which he staked and swept up the gold, was stiff and passionless as that of the commandant in *Don Giovanni.*

The baron could contain his indignation no longer. Leaving his daughter with her friends, he made his way round the tables, and approached the young man's chair. He extended

his hand to seize the player's arm, when his own was forcibly caught and held back. He turned, and saw a celebrated Prussian physician standing beside him.

"Stop, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed. "Do not speak to him. You know not the injury you might do him!"

"That is exactly my object. I'll spoil his game for him, the unprincipled hypocrite!"

"You will kill him."

"Absurd!"

"I am perfectly serious. Look at him. He sleeps! A sudden shock might be his death. You cannot see this, but I can. I have studied this thing narrowly, and I never beheld a more remarkable case of somnambulism."

The physician continued for some time conversing with the baron in an under tone. Presently the bank gave the signal; the players rose; the tables closed for that evening; and the Count von Steinberg, gathering up his enormous winnings, pushed back his

chair and left the rooms, passing close before the baron without seeing him.

They followed him down the street to his own door. He entered by means of his latch-key, and closed it behind him without a sound. There was no light in his window—no one stirring in the house. None but those two had seen him enter.

The next morning, when he awoke, he found a larger pile of gold than ever on his table. He counted it with a shudder, and told over 44,000 florins.

Again there came a knock at his chamber-door. This time he did not even attempt to conceal the money; and when the baron and physician entered, he was too unhappy even to feel surprise at the sight of a stranger.

"You have again come to tell me that I am a gambler!" he exclaimed, despairingly, as he pointed to the gold, and leaned his head listlessly upon his hands.

"I say it, Count, because I saw it," replied

the baron; "but at the same time I come to entreat your pardon for what passed at our last interview. You have gambled; but you are no gambler."

"Yes," interrupted the physician; "for somnambulists often perform the very actions which they would most abhor, if in a waking condition. But you are not a confirmed somnambulist. Yours is a mere functional derangement, and I can easily cure you. But, perhaps," he added, smiling, "you do not wish to lose so profitable a malady. You may become a *millionnaire*."

"Nay, doctor!" cried the count, "I place myself in your hands. Cure me, I entreat you!"

"Well, well, there is time enough for that," said the baron. "First of all, let us shake hands, and be friends."

"I have so great a horror of play," replied the involuntary gambler, "that I shall instantly restore this money to the bank.

See, here are, altogether, 130,000 florins!"

"Take my advice, Albert," said the baron, "and do no such thing. Suppose that in your sleep you had lost 130,000 florins, do you think the bank would have restored it to you? No, no; entertain no such scruples. Your father lost more than thrice that sum at those very tables,—it is but a restitution in part. Keep your florins, and return with me to my hotel, where Emma is waiting to receive you. You have 130,000 there. I will excuse the other 70,000 upon which I formerly insisted, and you can make it up in love. Are you content; or must you restore the money to the bank?"

History has not recorded the lover's reply; at all events, he quitted Ems that same day in company with the Baron von Hohendorf and his pretty daughter. The prescriptions of the learned physician have, it is said, already affected a cure, and the *Frankfort Journal*

announces the approaching marriage of Fräulein von Hohendorf with Albert, Count Steinberg.

CHAPTER X.

NUMBER THREE.

I AM a plain man, and you may not dislike to hear a plain statement of facts from me. Some of those facts lie beyond my understanding. I do not pretend to explain them. I only know that they happened as I relate them, and that I pledge myself for the truth of every word of them.

I began life roughly enough, down among the Worcestershire Potteries. I was an orphan; and my earliest recollections are of a great porcelain manufactory, where I helped about the yard, picked up what halfpence fell in my way, and slept in a

harness-loft over the stable. Those were hard times; but things bettered themselves as I grew older and stronger, especially after George Barnard had come to be foreman of the yard.

George Barnard was a Wesleyan—we were mostly dissenters in the Potteries—sober, clear-headed, somewhat sulky and silent, but a good fellow every inch of him, and my best friend at the time when I most needed one. He took me out of the yard, and set me to the furnace-work. He entered me on the books at a fixed rate of wages. He helped me to pay for a little cheap schooling four nights a week; and he led me to go with him on Sundays to the chapel down by the river-side, where I first saw Leah Payne. She was his sweetheart, and so pretty that I used to forget the preacher and everybody else when I looked at her. When she joined in the singing, I heard no voice but hers. If she asked me for the hymn-book, I used to blush and

tremble. I believe I worshipped her, in my stupid ignorant way; and I think I worshipped Barnard almost as blindly, though after a different fashion. I felt I owed him everything. I knew that he had saved me, body and mind; and I looked up to him as a savage might look up to a missionary.

Leah was the daughter of a plumber who lived close by the chapel. She was twenty, and George about seven or eight-and-thirty. Some captious folks said there was too much difference in their ages; but she was so serious-minded, and they loved each other so earnestly and quietly, that, if nothing had come between them during their courtship, I don't believe the question of disparity would ever have troubled the happiness of their married lives. Something did come, however; and that something was a Frenchman called Louis Laroche. He was a painter on porcelain, from the famous works at Sèvres; and our master, it was said, had engaged him for

three years certain, at such wages as none of our own people, however skilful, could hope to command. It was about the beginning or middle of September when he first came among us. He looked very young, was small, dark, and well-made; had little white soft hands, and a silky moustache; and spoke English nearly as well as I do. None of us liked him; but that was only natural, seeing how he was put over the head of every Englishman in the place. Besides, though he was always smiling and civil, we couldn't help seeing that he thought himself ever so much better than the rest of us; and that was not pleasant. Neither was it pleasant to see him strolling about the town, dressed just like a gentleman, when working hours were over; smoking good cigars, when we were forced to be content with a pipe of common tobacco; hiring a horse on Sunday afternoons, when we were trudging afoot; and taking his pleasure as if the world was made for him to enjoy, and us to work in.

"Ben, boy," said George, "there's something wrong about that Frenchman."

It was on a Saturday afternoon, and we were sitting on a pile of empty seggars against the door of my furnace-room, waiting till the men should all have cleared out of the yard. Seggars are deep earthen boxes in which the pottery is put, while being fired in the kiln.

I looked up inquiringly.

"About the Count?" said I; for that was the nickname by which he went in the pottery.

George nodded, and paused for a moment with his chin resting on his palms.

"He has an evil eye," said he, "and a false smile. Something wrong about him."

I drew nearer, and listened to George as if he had been an oracle.

"Besides," added he, in his slow quiet way, with his eyes fixed straight before him as if he was thinking aloud, "there's a young look about him that isn't natural. Take him just

at sight, and you'd think he was almost a boy; but look close at him—see the little fine wrinkles under his eyes, and the hard lines about his mouth, and then tell me his age, if you can! Why, Ben, boy, he's as old as I am, pretty near; ay, and as strong, too. You stare; but I tell you that, slight as he looks, he could fling you over his shoulder as if you were a feather. And as for his hands, little and white as they are, there are muscles of iron inside them, take my word for it."

"But, George, how can you know?"

"Because I have a warning against him," replied George, very gravely. "Because, whenever he is by, I feel as if my eyes saw clearer, and my ears heard keener, than at other times. Maybe it's presumption, but I sometimes feel as if I had a call to guard myself and others against him. Look at the children, Ben, how they shrink away from him; and see there, now! Ask Captain

what he thinks of him! Ben, that dog likes him no better than I do."

I looked, and saw Captain crouching by his kennel with his ears laid back, growling audibly as the Frenchman came slowly down the steps leading from his own workshop at the upper end of the yard. On the last step he paused, lighted a cigar, glanced round, as if to see whether any one was by, and then walked straight over to within a couple of yards of the kennel. Captain gave a short angry snarl, and laid his muzzle close down upon his paws, ready for a spring. The Frenchman folded his arms deliberately, fixed his eyes on the dog, and stood calmly smoking. He knew exactly how far he dared go, and kept just that one foot out of harm's way. All at once he stooped, puffed a mouthful of smoke in the dog's eyes, burst into a mocking laugh, turned lightly on his heel, and walked away, leaving Captain straining at his chain, and barking after him like a mad creature.

Days went by, and I, at work in my own department, saw no more of the Count. Sunday came—the third, I think, after I had talked with George in the yard. Going with George to chapel, as usual, in the morning, I noticed that there was something strange and anxious in his face, and that he scarcely opened his lips to me on the way. Still I said nothing. It was not my place to question him; and I remember thinking to myself that the cloud would all clear off as soon as he found himself by Leah's side, holding the same book, and joining in the same hymn. It did not, however, for no Leah was there. I looked every moment to the door, expecting to see her sweet face coming in; but George never lifted his eyes from his book, or seemed to notice that her place was empty. Thus the whole service went by, and my thoughts wandered continually from the words of the preacher. As soon as the last blessing was spoken, and we were fairly across the thres-

hold, I turned to George, and asked if Leah was ill?

"No," said he, gloomily. "She's not ill."

"Then why wasn't she . . . . ?"

"I'll tell you why," he interrupted impatiently. "Because you've seen her here for the last time. She's never coming to chapel again."

"Never coming to chapel again?" I faltered, laying my hand on his sleeve in the earnestness of my surprise. "Why, George, what is the matter?"

But he shook my hand off, and stamped with his iron heel till the pavement rang again.

"Don't ask me," said he, roughly. "Let me alone. You'll know soon enough."

And with this he turned off down a by-lane leading towards the hills, and left me without another word.

I had had plenty of hard treatment in my

time ; but never, until that moment, an angry look or syllable from George. I did not know how to bear it. That day my dinner seemed as if it would choke me ; and in the afternoon I went out and wandered restlessly about the fields till the hour for evening prayers came round. I then returned to the chapel, and sat down on a tomb outside, waiting for George. I saw the congregation go in by twos and threes ; heard the first psalm-tune echo solemnly through the evening stillness ; but no George came. Then the service began, and I knew that, punctual as his habits were, it was of no use to expect him any longer. Where could he be ? What could have happened ? Why should Leah Payne never come to chapel again ? Had she gone over to some other sect, and was that why George seemed so unhappy?

Sitting there in the little dreary churchyard, with the darkness fast gathering around me, I asked myself these questions over and

over again, till my brain ached; for I was not much used to thinking about anything in those times. At last, I could bear to sit quiet no longer. The sudden thought struck me that I would go to Leah, and learn what the matter was from her own lips. I sprang to my feet, and set off at once towards her home.

It was quite dark, and a light rain was beginning to fall. I found the garden-gate open, and a quick hope flashed across me that George might be there. I drew back for a moment, hesitating whether to knock or ring, when a sound of voices in the passage, and the sudden gleaming of a bright line of light under the door, warned me that some one was coming out. Taken by surprise, and quite unprepared for the moment with anything to say, I shrank back behind the porch, and waited until those within should have passed out. The door opened, and the light streamed suddenly upon the roses and the wet gravel.

"It rains," said Leah, bending forward and shading the candle with her hand.

"And is as cold as Siberia," added another voice, which was not George's, and yet sounded strangely familiar. "Ugh! what a climate for such a flower as my darling to bloom in!"

"Is it so much finer in France?" asked Leah, softly.

"As much finer as blue skies and sunshine can make it. Why, my angel, even your bright eyes will be ten times brighter, and your rosy cheeks ten times rosier, when they are transplanted to Paris. Ah! I can give you no idea of the wonders of Paris—the broad streets planted with trees, the palaces, the shops, the gardens!—it is a city of enchantment."

"It must be, indeed!" said Leah. "And you will really take me to see all those beautiful shops?"

"Every Sunday, my darling—Bah! don't

look so shocked. The shops in Paris are always open on Sunday, and everybody makes holiday. You will soon get over these prejudices."

"I fear it is very wrong to take so much pleasure in the things of this world," sighed Leah.

The Frenchman laughed, and answered her with a kiss.

"Good night, my sweet little saint!" said he, as he ran lightly down the path, and disappeared in the darkness. Leah sighed again, lingered a moment, and then closed the door.

Stupefied and bewildered, I stood for some seconds like a stone statue, unable to move, scarcely able to think. At length, I roused myself, as it were mechanically, and went towards the gate. At that instant a heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder, and a hoarse voice close beside my ear, said:—

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

It was George. I knew him at once, in spite of the darkness, and stammered his name. He took his hand quickly from my shoulder.

"How long have you been here?" said he, fiercely. "What right have you to lurk about, like a spy in the dark? God help me, Ben—I'm half mad. I don't mean to be harsh to you."

"I'm sure you don't," I cried, earnestly.

"It's that cursed Frenchman," he went on, in a voice that sounded like the groan of one in pain. "He's a villain. I know he's a villain; and I've had a warning against him ever since the first moment he came among us. He'll make her miserable, and break her heart some day—my pretty Leah—and I loved her so! But I'll be revenged—as sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll be revenged!"

His vehemence terrified me. I tried to persuade him to go home; but he would not listen to me.

"No, no," he said. "Go home yourself, boy, and let me be. My blood is on fire: this rain is good for me, and I am better alone."

"If I could only do something to help you...."

"You can't," interrupted he. "Nobody can help me. I'm a ruined man, and I don't care what becomes of me. The Lord forgive me! my heart is full of wickedness, and my thoughts are the promptings of Satan. There go—for heaven's sake, go. I don't know what I say, or what I do."

I went, for I did not dare refuse any longer; but I lingered awhile at the corner of the street, and watched him pacing to and fro, to and fro, in the driving rain. At length I turned reluctantly away, and went home.

I lay awake that night for hours, thinking over the events of the day, and hating the Frenchman from my very soul. I could not hate Leah. I had worshipped her too long

and was suddenly for him: but I soothed him her as a creature given over to destruction. I left about twenty minutes morning, and was again shortly after daybreak. Then I reached the pottery. I found George there before me, looking very pale, but quite himself, and setting the men at their work the same as usual. I said nothing about what had happened the day before. Something in his face alarmed me: but seeing him so steady and composed, I took heart, and began to hope he had thought through the worst of his trouble. By-and-by the Frenchman came through the yard, spry and efficient, with his cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets. George turned sharply away into one of the workshops, and shut the door. I drew a deep breath of relief. My dread was to see them come to an open quarrel; and I felt that as long as they kept clear of that all would be well.

Thus the Monday went by, and the Tuesday; but still George kept aloof from me. I

had sense enough not to be hurt by this. I felt he had a good right to be silent, if silence helped him to bear his trial better; and I made up my mind never to breathe another syllable on the subject, unless he began.

Wednesday came. I had overslept myself that morning, and came to work a quarter after the hour, expecting to be fined; for George was very strict as foreman of the yard, and treated friends and enemies just the same. instead of blaming me, however, he called me up, and said:—

"Ben, whose turn is it this week to sit up?"

"Mine, sir." I replied. (I always called him "Sir" in working hours.)

"Well, then, you may go home to-day, and the same on Thursday and Friday; for there's a large batch of work for the ovens to-night, and there'll be the same to-morrow night and the night after."

"All right, sir," said I. "Then I'll be here by seven this evening."

"No, half-past nine will be soon enough. I've some accounts to make up, and I shall be here myself till then. Mind you are true to time, though."

"I'll be as true as the clock, sir," I replied, and was turning away when he called me back again.

"You're a good lad, Ben," said he. "Shake hands."

I seized his hand and pressed it warmly.

"If I'm good for anything, George," I answered with all my heart, "it's you who have made me so. God bless you for it!"

"Amen!" said he in a troubled voice, putting his hand to his hat.

And so we parted.

In general, I went to bed by day when I was attending to the firing by night; but this morning I had already slept longer than usual, and wanted exercise more than rest. So I ran home; put a bit of bread and meat in my pocket; snatched up my big thorn stick; and

started off for a long day in the country. When I came home, it was quite dark and beginning to rain, just as it had begun to rain at about the same time that wretched Sunday evening; so I changed my wet boots, had an early supper and a nap in the chimney-corner, and went down to the works at a few minutes before half-past nine. Arriving at the factory gate, I found it ajar, and so walked in and closed it after me. I remember thinking at the time that it was unlike George's usual caution to leave it so; but it passed from my mind next moment. Having slipped in the bolt, then went straight over to George's little counting-house, where the gas was shining cheerfully in the window. Here, also, somewhat to my surprise, I found the door open, and the room empty. I went in. The threshold and part of the floor were wetted by the driving rain. The wages-book was open on the desk, George's pen stood in the ink, and his hat hung on its usual peg in the corner.

I concluded, of course, that he had gone round to the ovens; so, following him, I took down his hat and carried it with me, for it was now raining fast.

The baking-houses lay just opposite, on the other side of the yard. There were three of them, opening one out of the other; and in each the great furnace filled all the middle of the room. These furnaces are, in fact, large kilns built of brick, with an oven closed in by an iron door in the centre of each, and a chimney going up through the roof. The pottery, enclosed in seggars, stands round inside on shelves, and has to be turned from time to time while the firing is going on. To turn these seggars, test the heat, and keep the fires up, was my work at the period of which I am now telling you.

Well! I went through the baking-houses one after the other, and found all empty alike. Then a strange, vague, uneasy feeling came over me, and I began to wonder what could

have become of George. It was possible that he might be in one of the workshops; so I ran over to the counting-house, lighted a lantern, and made a thorough survey of the yards. I tried the doors; they were all locked as usual. I peeped into the open sheds; they were all vacant. I called "George! George!" in every part of the outer premises; but the wind and rain drove back my voice, and no other voice replied to it. Forced at last to believe that he was really gone, I took his hat back to the counting-house, put away the wages-book, extinguished the gas, and prepared for my solitary watch.

The night was mild, and the heat in the baking-rooms intense. I knew, by experience, that the ovens had been overheated, and that none of the porcelain must go in for at least the next two hours; so I carried my stool to the door, settled myself in a sheltered corner where the air could reach me, but not the rain, and fell to wondering where George

could have gone, and why he should not have waited till the time appointed. That he had left in haste was clear—not because his hat remained behind, for he might have had a cap with him—but because he had left the book open, and the gas lighted. Perhaps one of the workmen had met with some accident, and he had been summoned away so urgently that he had no time to think of anything; perhaps he would even now come back presently to see that all was right before he went home to his lodgings. Turning these things over in my mind, I grew drowsy, my thoughts wandered, and I fell asleep.

I cannot tell how long my nap lasted. I had walked a great distance that day, and I slept heavily; but I awoke all in a moment, with a sort of terror upon me, and, looking up, saw George Barnard sitting on a stool before the oven door, with the firelight full upon his face.

Ashamed to be found sleeping, I started to

my feet. At the same instant, he rose, turned away without even looking towards me, and went out into the next room.

"Don't be angry, George!" I cried, following him. "None of the seggars are in. I knew the fires were too strong, and——"

The words died on my lips. I had followed him from the first room to the second, from the second to the third, and in the third—I lost him!

I could not believe my eyes. I opened the end door leading into the yard, and looked out; but he was nowhere in sight. I went round to the back of the baking-houses, looked behind the furnaces, ran over to the counting-house, called him by his name over and over again; but all was dark, silent, lonely, as ever.

Then I remembered how I had bolted the outer gate, and how impossible it was that he should have come in without ringing. Then, too, I began again to doubt the evidence of

my own senses, and to think I must have been dreaming.

I went back to my old post by the door of the first baking-house, and sat down for a moment to collect my thoughts.

"In the first place," said I to myself, "there is but one outer gate. That outer gate I bolted on the inside, and it is bolted still. In the next place, I searched the premises, and found all the sheds empty, and the workshop-doors padlocked as usual on the outside. I proved that George was nowhere about, when I came, and I know he could not have come in since, without my knowledge. Therefore it is a dream. It is certainly a dream, and there's an end of it."

And with this I trimmed my lantern and proceeded to test the temperature of the furnaces. We used to do this, I should tell you, by the introduction of little roughly-moulded lumps of common fire-clay. If the heat is too great, they crack; if too little, they

remain damp and moist; if just right, they become firm and smooth all over, and pass into the biscuit stage. Well! I took my three little lumps of clay, put one in each oven, waited while I counted five hundred, and then went round again to see the results. The two first were in capital condition, the third had flown into a dozen pieces. This proved that the seggars might at once go into ovens One and Two, but that number Three had been over-heated, and must be allowed to go on cooling for an hour or two longer.

I therefore stocked One and Two with nine rows of seggars, three deep on each shelf; left the rest waiting till number Three was in a condition to be trusted; and, fearful of falling asleep again, now that the firing was in progress, walked up and down the rooms to keep myself awake. This was hot work, however, and I could not stand it very long; so I went back presently to my stool by the door, and fell to thinking about my dream. The more

I thought of it, the more strangely real it seemed, and the more I felt convinced that I was actually on my feet, when I saw George get up and walk into the adjoining room. I was also certain that I had still continued to see him as he passed out of the second room into the third, and that at that time I was even following his very footsteps. Was it possible, I asked myself, that I could have been up and moving, and yet not quite awake? I had heard of people walking in their sleep. Could it be that I was walking in mine, and never waked till I reached the cool air of the yard? All this seemed likely enough, so I dismissed the matter from my mind, and passed the rest of the night in attending to the seggars, adding fresh fuel from time to time to the furnaces of the first and second ovens, and now and then taking a turn through the yards. As for number Three, it kept up its heat to such a degree that it was almost day before I dared trust the seggars to go in it.

Thus the hours went by; and at half-past seven on Thursday morning, the men came to their work. It was now my turn to go off duty, but I wanted to see George before I left, and so waited for him in the counting-house, while a lad name Steve Storr took my place at the ovens. But the clock went on from half-past seven to a quarter to eight; then to eight o'clock; then to a quarter-past eight—and still George never made his appearance. At length, when the hand got round to half-past eight, I grew weary of waiting, took up my hat, ran home, went to bed, and slept profoundly until past four in the afternoon.

That evening I went down to the factory quite early; for I had a restlessness upon me, and I wanted to see George before he left for the night. This time, I found the gate bolted, and I rang for admittance.

"How early you are, Ben!" said Steve Storr, as he let me in.

"Mr. Barnard's not gone?" I asked, quick-

ly; for I saw at the first glance that the gas was out in the counting-house.

"He's not gone," said Steve, "because he's never been."

"Never been?"

"No: and what's stranger still, he's not been home either, since dinner yesterday."

"But he was here last night."

"Oh yes, he was here last night, making up the books. John Parker was with him till past six; and you found him here, didn't you, at half-past nine?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he's gone, anyhow. Good night!"

"Good night!"

I took the lantern from his hand, bolted him out mechanically, and made my way to the baking-houses, like one in a stupor. George gone? Gone without a word of warning to his employer, or of farewell to his fellow-workmen? I could not understand it. I could not believe it. I sat down bewildered, in-

credulous, stunned. Then came hot tears, doubts, terrifying suspicions. I remembered the wild words he had spoken a few nights back; the strange calm by which they were followed; my dream of the evening before. I had heard of men who drowned themselves for love; and the turbid Severn ran close by —so close, that one might pitch a stone into it from some of the workshop windows.

These thoughts were too horrible. I dared not dwell upon them. I turned to work, to free myself from them, if I could; and began by examining the ovens. The temperature of all was much higher than on the previous night, the heat having been gradually increased during the last twelve hours. It was now my business to keep the heat on the increase for twelve more; after which it would be allowed, as gradually, to subside, until the pottery was cool enough for removal. To turn the seggars, and add fuel to the two first furnaces, was my first work. As before, I found number three

in advance of the others, and so left it for half an hour, or an hour. I then went round the yard; tried the doors; let the dog loose; and brought him back with me to the baking-houses, for company. After that, I set my lantern on a shelf beside the door, took a book from my pocket, and began to read.

I remember the title of the book as well as possible. It was called "Bowlker's Art of Angling," and contained little rude cuts of all kinds of artificial flies, hooks, and other tackle. But I could not keep my mind to it for two minutes together; and at last I gave it up in despair, covered my face with my hands, and fell into a long, absorbing, painful train of thought. A considerable time had gone by thus—maybe an hour—when I was roused by a low whimpering howl from Captain, who was lying at my feet. I looked up with a start, just as I had started from sleep the night before, and with the same vague terror; and saw, exactly in the same

place and in the same attitude, with the firelight full upon him—George Barnard!

At this sight, a fear heavier than the fear of death fell upon me, and my tongue seemed paralysed in my mouth. Then, just as last night, he rose, or seemed to rise, and went slowly out into the next room. A power stronger than myself compelled me, reluctantly, to follow him. I saw him pass through the second room—cross the threshold of the third—walk straight up to the oven—and there pause. He then turned, for the first time, with the glare of the red firelight pouring out upon him from the open door of the furnace, and looked at me, face to face. In the same instant, his whole frame and countenance seemed to glow and become transparent, as if the fire were all within him and around him—and in that glow he became, as it were, absorbed into the furnace, and disappeared!

I uttered a wild cry, tried to stagger from

the room, and fell insensible before I reached the door.

When I next opened my eyes, the grey dawn was in the sky; the furnace doors were all closed as I had left them when I last went round; the dog was quietly sleeping not far from my side; and the men were ringing at the gate, to be let in.

I told my tale from beginning to end, and was laughed at, as a matter of course, by all who heard it. When it was found, however, that my statements never varied, and, above all, that George Barnard continued absent, some few began to talk it over seriously, and among those few, the master of the works. He forbade the furnace to be cleared out, called in the aid of a celebrated naturalist, and had the ashes submitted to a scientific examination. The result was as follows:

The ashes were found to have been largely saturated with some kind of fatty animal matter.

A considerable portion of those ashes consisted of charred bone. A semi-circular piece of iron, which had evidently once been the heel of a workman's heavy boot, was found, half fused, at one corner of the furnace. Near it, a tibia bone, which still retained sufficient of its original form and texture to render identification possible. This bone, however, was so much charred, that it fell into powder on being handled.

After this, not many doubted that George Barnard had been foully murdered, and that his body had been thrust into the furnace. Suspicion fell upon Louis Laroche. He was arrested, a coroner's inquest was held, and every circumstance connected with the night of the murder was as thoroughly sifted and investigated as possible. All the sifting in the world, however, failed either to clear or to condemn Louis Laroche. On the very night of his release, he left the place by the mail train, and was never seen or heard of there,

again. As for Leah, I know not what became of her. I went away myself before many weeks were over, and never have set foot among the Potteries from that hour to this.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE